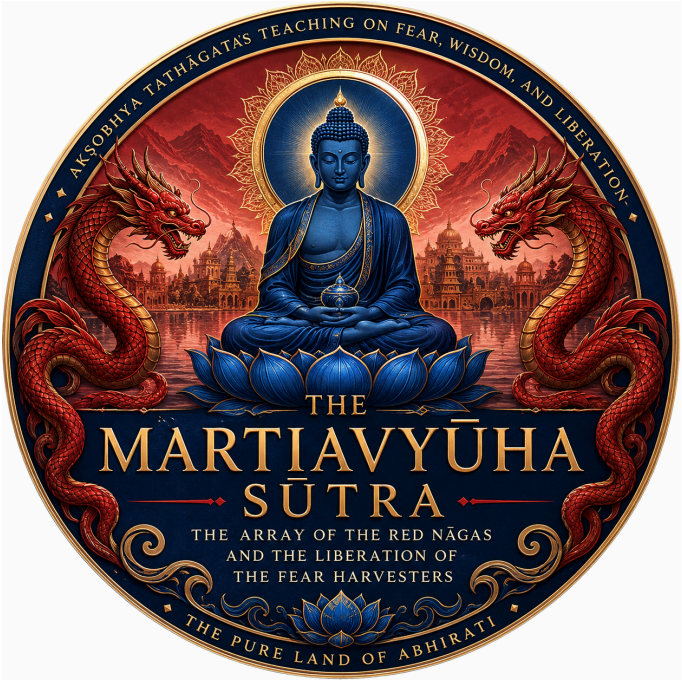
The Martiavyūha Sūtra
PART 2

The Array of the Red Nāgas and the Liberation of the Fear Harvesters



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Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 57

The Repentance of the Amphibian Kings

Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed Akṣobhya, the Tathāgata of Imperturbable Suchness, was abiding in the immeasurable Pure Land of Abhirati, surrounded by an assembly of innumerable bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, and beings from worlds beyond calculation.

After the discourse concerning the Seeds of Awakening had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his lotus seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, knelt upon his right knee, and addressed the World-Honored One:

"Blessed One, throughout these teachings we have heard of the rise and decline of the peoples of the Red World, of fear and delusion, of hidden compassion and forgotten vows. We have learned that no being is forever condemned and that Buddha-Nature remains obscured but never destroyed.

Tell us now: by what causes did the first among the ancient rulers of Raktaloka sincerely repent and return to the Dharma?"

The Blessed One looked upon Sāgaramati with eyes like tranquil sapphire lakes and replied:

"Excellent, excellent, noble son.

You inquire not to condemn those who erred, but to understand the causes by which delusion transforms into wisdom.

Attend carefully, and I shall explain the Repentance of the Amphibian Kings."

The entire assembly became silent.

Even the jeweled birds perched upon the branches surrounding the lakes of Abhirati ceased their songs.

Then the Blessed One emitted a ray of radiant blue light that crossed immeasurable Buddha-fields and illuminated an ancient era of Raktaloka.

There appeared a hidden valley sheltered beneath cliffs where subterranean springs still nourished emerald pools.

Within that refuge dwelt descendants of the old Amphibian Kings, once renowned for their learning and mastery of waterworks.

Though materially diminished, they still preserved fragments of their ancestral records.

Their leader was King Varuṇaketu.

He possessed intelligence, discipline, and administrative skill, yet his heart remained burdened by inherited pride.

Each year he presided over ceremonies celebrating the former greatness of his lineage.

The walls of his palace displayed victories, inventions, and treaties.

But nowhere were the sufferings caused by ambition or fear remembered.

One evening, while walking alone beside a spring beneath the stars, the king encountered an elderly mendicant monk clothed in patched robes.

The monk neither bowed nor flattered him.

Instead he quietly washed his begging bowl.

After some time the king asked,

"Do you know before whom you stand?"

The monk replied gently,

"I know only that suffering stands before me."

The king frowned.

"Have you no respect for kingship?"

The monk answered,

"I respect virtue wherever it appears.

Crowns, however, are temporary arrangements."

The king departed irritated.

Yet the conversation lingered in his thoughts.

For many nights he could not sleep peacefully.

He found himself repeatedly recalling the monk's words:

"Crowns are temporary arrangements."

The Blessed One declared to the assembly:

"Thus the first seed of repentance entered through wounded pride."

Then he recited:

A crack
In certainty

Allows wisdom
To enter.

Blessed therefore

Is the question

That unsettles
Conceit.

The vision shifted.

Soon afterward severe flooding threatened several farming villages downstream.

Engineers proposed protecting the royal estates first.

The elderly monk, invited unexpectedly to advise, suggested another course.

"Strengthen the smallest dams.

The waters naturally seek low places.

Protect the vulnerable first."

Many ministers objected.

The king hesitated.

At last he ordered the monk's plan followed.

The harvest survived.

Thousands were spared.

Only later did officials calculate that preserving the poorest settlements had indirectly protected the royal lands as well.

King Varuṇaketu summoned the monk privately.

"How did you foresee this?"

The monk smiled.

"I merely asked where compassion should flow first."

The king remained silent.

Within his heart another seed was planted.

The Blessed One spoke in verse:

Water seeks
The lowest ground.

So too compassion

Finds first

Those most in need.

The vision broadened.

In later months the king secretly visited ordinary villages disguised in simple clothing.

He expected to hear praise for recent policies.

Instead he encountered widows still mourning preventable losses from earlier years, laborers burdened by unfair taxes imposed by previous administrations, and children repeating fearful stories taught by their grandparents.

No rebellion stirred among them.

Only sadness.

Returning to the palace, the king sat alone before ancestral portraits.

For the first time he wondered whether greatness measured by monuments might conceal failure measured by tears.

The Blessed One declared:

"The beginning of repentance is honest remembrance."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The king dreamed that he wandered through an immense hall lined with mirrors.

Each reflected not his own face but the expressions of every being affected by his decisions.

Some smiled.

Some wept.

Some looked frightened.

Some looked relieved.

Attempting to turn away, he discovered mirrors extending endlessly in every direction.

Finally an unseen voice asked:

"Which reflection is truly yours?"

Awakening before dawn, he trembled.

The Buddha explained:

"The ruler and the ruled arise interdependently.

To ignore one is to misunderstand the other."

The devas rejoiced.

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, did the king immediately renounce his throne?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"No.

Repentance need not abandon responsibility.

Sometimes remaining in office while transforming conduct benefits more beings than retreating into solitude.

The Dharma judges not status but intention."

The vision shifted again.

King Varuṇaketu ordered old archives opened without censorship.

Historians received permission to record both achievements and failures.

Monasteries were invited to teach ethics within public schools.

Tax collectors were instructed to remit obligations during famine.

Judges reviewed wrongful convictions.

The treasury funded irrigation before monuments.

Some nobles protested bitterly.

The king listened patiently and replied:

"Our ancestors preserved stone.

Let us preserve people."

Many opposed him.

Many supported him.

Yet gradually trust returned.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Thus repentance became administration."

Then he recited:

Confession
Without amendment

Is an echo.

Amendment
Without humility

Is calculation.

But confession
Joined to transformation

Ripens
Into wisdom.

The vision deepened.

Years later the elderly monk fell gravely ill.

The king personally visited his modest dwelling carrying medicines.

The monk accepted them gratefully.

Before his death he offered only one instruction:

"When history praises you, remember your errors.

When history condemns you, remember your capacity to learn.

Walk between pride and despair."

With those words he passed peacefully into meditative stillness.

The king wept openly.

Thereafter he ordered no statues erected in his own honor.

Instead he commissioned wells, schools, hospitals, and gardens.

Asked why his likeness appeared nowhere, he answered:

"If future generations drink clean water, they need not know who dug the well."

The Blessed One praised him before the assembly.

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly beheld a crown forged from translucent crystal.

At first it sparkled magnificently.

Yet hidden within were countless tiny cracks.

As the wearer acknowledged mistakes sincerely, each crack filled with blue light until the entire crown became transparent and nearly invisible.

Finally the wearer removed it completely and placed it beneath a bodhi tree.

The tree flourished.

The Buddha explained:

"Authority surrendered to wisdom nourishes future generations."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"Blessed One, what became of the descendants of this king?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Many followed his example imperfectly.

Some relapsed into attachment.

Some advanced further along the Bodhisattva Path.

The important inheritance was not bloodline but ethical reform.

Merit descends through conduct more reliably than ancestry."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One manifested one final vision.

Across the valleys of the Red World stood innumerable pools reflecting the dawn.

The elderly monk appeared in each reflection simultaneously, though nowhere physically present.

Beside every pool knelt a ruler washing dust from his own hands before serving others.

The waters remained clear because none attempted to possess them.

The Buddha declared:

"Repentance is not humiliation.

It is cleansing.

It is the recognition that one may begin again while remembering the lessons of the past."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the gathered assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Thus the Repentance of the Amphibian Kings became the first great turning in the redemption of the peoples of Raktaloka.

Not through conquest.

Not through fear.

Not through miracles.

But through truthful memory, compassionate reform, humble service, and the courage to acknowledge suffering previously ignored.

Whoever practices likewise, regardless of birth or station, enters the stream leading toward Buddhahood."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Wash not only
The hands,

But intention.

Polish not only
The crown,

But conscience.

Repair not only
The walls,

But trust.

For the king
Who kneels
Before compassion

Already sits

Upon the highest throne

In all the worlds.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated profound faith in the transforming power of repentance joined with compassionate action.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over the lakes of Abhirati.

The nāga kings bowed until their foreheads touched the jeweled earth.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati renewed his vow to guide rulers and commoners alike toward Mirror-Like Wisdom, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 58

The Tears of the Desert Lords

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Repentance of the Amphibian Kings had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his lotus seat, placed his palms together, and bowed before the World-Honored One.

He asked:

"Blessed One, the Amphibian Kings have begun to turn their minds toward compassion, yet what of the Desert Lords, whose ancestors dwelt beneath the red cliffs and wandering dunes? Their traditions were often marked by severity, endurance, and pride.

Did they also awaken to remorse, or did they continue indefinitely upon the path of domination?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, do not imagine that one temperament permanently belongs to any lineage.

Those who appear hardest may hide deep reservoirs of tenderness.

Those who appear gentle may harbor concealed resentment.

Judge neither by outward appearance.

Attend instead to the transformation of intention.

Hear now of the Tears of the Desert Lords."

The assembly became still.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire ray that illuminated the deserts of ancient Raktaloka many generations after the decline of its kingdoms.

The assembly beheld caravans crossing endless crimson dunes beneath a brilliant sky.

Scattered among the rocks stood fortified settlements built around precious springs.

Their inhabitants had learned resilience through harsh conditions.

Chief among these settlements ruled Lord Kṣemarāja, elder of one of the old Desert Houses.

He possessed stern discipline and remarkable courage.

His judgments were swift.

His commands rarely questioned.

His people respected him but approached him with caution rather than affection.

Every morning he climbed the highest watchtower and surveyed the surrounding sands.

One dawn he noticed an unusual sight.

A lone child from a neighboring tribe had become separated from her caravan and wandered near collapse under the relentless sun.

Some advisors urged caution.

"She belongs to another people."

Others warned of possible traps.

Kṣemarāja descended from the tower himself, carried the child into the shade, offered water from his own flask, and summoned physicians.

When the child recovered, she smiled and asked only:

"Why did you help me?"

The lord hesitated.

At last he answered,

"Because thirst recognizes no tribe."

Those simple words echoed through his own mind for many nights.

The Blessed One declared:

"Compassion often begins before philosophy explains it."

Then he recited:

The desert wind

Names no nation.

The rain cloud

Selects no clan.

Likewise

The awakened heart

Measures beings

By suffering,

Not by boundary.

The vision shifted.

Years later the same child, now grown into a skilled healer, returned to aid Kṣemarāja's settlement during an outbreak of disease.

Recognizing her, the old lord asked:

"Why travel so far for those unrelated to you?"

She smiled gently.

"Because illness recognizes no tribe."

Hearing his own earlier words reflected back to him, the Desert Lord fell silent.

For the first time in many years he wept.

His attendants had never before seen tears upon his face.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Thus pride dissolved not through defeat but through gratitude."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, why do tears accompany awakening?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"When delusion loosens, beings often perceive suffering long ignored.

Some weep for harms committed.

Some for kindness received but never appreciated.

Some for opportunities neglected.

Yet tears flowing from wisdom cleanse rather than imprison."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The cloud

Must release rain

To lighten itself.

The heart

Must release sorrow

To reveal compassion.

The vision broadened.

The Desert Lords assembled for their annual council beneath towering stone arches.

Tradition required each ruler to recount victories won over rival houses.

When Kṣemarāja's turn arrived, he surprised the gathering.

Instead of celebrating conquest, he listed mistakes.

He described taxes that had burdened widows.

Punishments later found excessive.

Negotiations abandoned too quickly.

He concluded:

"These are the battles I truly lost."

Many listeners felt uncomfortable.

A few became angry.

Yet several younger rulers quietly began revising their own records.

The Blessed One declared:

"Confession spoken by the respected grants permission for honesty among the hesitant."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly saw seven stone statues standing in the desert.

Each represented one of the old Desert Houses.

For ages no expression appeared upon their faces.

Suddenly one statue shed a single drop of water from its eye.

The drop struck the ground and immediately a blue lotus emerged.

Soon another tear fell, then another, until an oasis surrounded the statues.

The Buddha explained:

"The tears symbolize humility nourishing the field where wisdom grows."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A wandering bodhisattva visited Kṣemarāja disguised as a simple potter.

The two spent several evenings discussing leadership.

Finally the potter asked:

"Which is more difficult—to command obedience or to admit error?"

The lord answered without hesitation:

"To admit error."

The potter smiled.

"Then begin there."

Only after many years did Kṣemarāja suspect that his visitor had been no ordinary artisan.

The Blessed One praised this encounter.

"Skillful means often arrive wearing ordinary clothing."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, can repentance spread through example alone?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"Indeed.

When one influential person sincerely changes course, countless observers discover that transformation is possible.

Thus one tear honestly shed may extinguish fires no army could overcome."

The Blessed One recited:

The hardest stone

Yields slowly

To falling water.

Likewise

The hardest heart

Softens

Through repeated compassion.

The vision deepened.

Following Kṣemarāja's example, annual councils changed their custom.

Each ruler now recounted not only successes but lessons learned through failure.

Archives preserved reconciliations alongside victories.

Memorials honored peacemakers as well as defenders.

Children grew up hearing stories of courage joined with humility rather than domination alone.

The moral atmosphere of the region gradually transformed.

The Buddha declared:

"Institutions become wholesome when repentance enters tradition."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly beheld a caravan carrying immense jars labeled **Honor**, **Power**, **Reputation**, and **Legacy**.

The jars proved extraordinarily heavy.

Travelers struggled across the dunes.

An old woman quietly emptied each vessel and filled them instead with water.

The caravan became lighter, and many lives were saved.

Asked why she made the exchange, she replied:

"Names do not quench thirst."

The Blessed One smiled.

"The truly valuable often appears ordinary."

The vision shifted once more.

Near the end of his life Kṣemarāja revisited the watchtower where he had first seen the lost child.

This time he carried no weapons.

Looking across the endless sands, he whispered:

"May every traveler find water before despair."

He then established wells at regular intervals along the caravan routes, available freely to all regardless of origin.

Merchants later called them the Wells of Repentance.

Many survived because of them.

The lord's descendants considered them his greatest accomplishment.

The Buddha praised this legacy.

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The deserts of Raktaloka appeared under brilliant moonlight.

From the eyes of countless stone guardians flowed clear streams that converged into a single river winding across the dunes.

Wherever the river passed, hostility diminished.

Gardens appeared.

Children played together.

Pilgrims rested safely.

The river reached eventually toward the imagined direction of Abhirati itself.

The Blessed One explained:

"The Tears of the Desert Lords represent the release of ancient pride into the current of bodhicitta.

No moisture is wasted when offered for the benefit of beings."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the entire assembly, Akṣobhya declared:

"Know therefore that sincere remorse is not weakness.

It is among the highest expressions of courage.

Those who refuse ever to weep remain imprisoned by self-image.

Those who permit compassion to soften the heart become fertile ground for awakening.

Thus even the stern rulers of the deserts entered the path leading toward Buddhahood."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Let the eye

Grow moist,

If wisdom
Has entered.

Let the heart

Grow tender,

If pride
Has departed.

For tears shed

In service
Of compassion

Become rivers

Guiding countless beings

Across

The deserts

Of saṃsāra.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas attained deeper realization of humility and repentance.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over the jeweled plains of Abhirati.

The nāga kings bowed with tears of gratitude, and where their tears touched the ground blue lotuses arose.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati prostrated before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 59

The Renunciation of Fear Harvesting

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Tears of the Desert Lords had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his lotus seat, bowed deeply before the World-Honored One, and asked:

"Blessed One, the peoples of Raktaloka have begun to repent. Their rulers have shed tears and acknowledged past errors. Yet one ancient habit remains to be addressed.

How did they finally renounce the cultivation of fear itself and abandon every attempt to profit from anxiety, manipulation, and domination?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, among all renunciations this was one of the most difficult.

To relinquish possessions is comparatively easy.

To relinquish reputation requires greater effort.

But to relinquish the subtle satisfaction of controlling others through fear demands profound wisdom and unwavering compassion.

Hear now the account of the Renunciation of Fear Harvesting."

The assembly became perfectly silent.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire ray that illuminated a later age of the Red World.

The surviving descendants of the Amphibian Kings and Desert Lords had established peaceful councils and renewed ethical institutions.

Yet traces of ancient customs lingered.

Some administrators still believed that frightened populations obeyed more readily.

Some merchants quietly exaggerated shortages to increase profit.

Some teachers cultivated shame rather than understanding.

Some parents mistook intimidation for discipline.

Though gross cruelty had diminished, subtle habits remained.

The Blessed One declared:

"The deepest roots are often the last to be removed."

Then he recited:

The tree
May be felled.

Yet hidden roots

Still drink
Beneath the earth.

Excavate patiently.

The vision shifted.

At that time there lived a contemplative physician named Ratnaśīla.

Traveling from village to village, she observed a peculiar pattern.

Communities governed through threats suffered constant unrest.

Communities guided through trust recovered more quickly from hardship.

Rather than condemn anyone, she carefully recorded her observations.

Years later she presented them before a gathering of rulers.

Displaying no accusation, she simply asked:

"In which villages do children laugh more freely?"

Silence filled the hall.

The answer was evident.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Compassion often persuades more effectively than rebuke."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, why does fear appear useful despite its harmful consequences?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Because fear produces rapid compliance while concealing long-term injury.

Trust matures slowly but endures.

The impatient choose domination.

The wise cultivate confidence."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The lash

Moves quickly.

Understanding

Moves deeply.

The frightened branch

Bends for a moment.

The rooted tree

Stands for generations.

The vision broadened.

Representatives from the old Serpent Houses convened in a vast circular hall built where seven caravan roads met.

No throne occupied the center.

Instead a shallow basin of perfectly still water reflected every face equally.

The eldest among them stood and addressed the assembly:

"Our ancestors believed influence could be strengthened by increasing fear.

We have inherited suspicion, secrecy, and division.

Let us examine whether these methods ever produced lasting peace."

For seven days witnesses testified.

Farmers described anxiety destroying cooperation.

Teachers recounted children silenced by humiliation.

Merchants confessed exploiting panic during shortages.

Former officials admitted issuing exaggerated warnings to preserve authority.

No punishments followed these admissions.

Only attentive listening.

At the conclusion of the council the basin remained perfectly calm.

The Blessed One explained:

"Mirror-Like Wisdom reflects confession without distortion."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld countless invisible threads extending from fearful thoughts.

Each thread sought to bind another being.

Yet every new binding simultaneously tightened around the original weaver.

Eventually those who attempted to imprison others found themselves unable to move.

A young novice simply released the thread in his own hand.

Instantly the entire web loosened.

The Buddha declared:

"The one who relinquishes manipulation becomes free first."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

King Varuṇaketu's grandson inherited responsibility for administering several provinces.

Advisors recommended increasing surveillance, harsher penalties, and constant public warnings.

Instead he introduced transparent laws, open councils, and opportunities for appeal.

When challenged, he replied:

"I prefer citizens who cooperate because they understand rather than because they tremble."

Initial progress appeared slow.

Yet after several years theft declined, civic participation increased, and disputes were resolved more peacefully.

The neighboring realms gradually adopted similar reforms.

The Blessed One praised this patient leadership.

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, may fear ever be skillfully employed for wholesome ends?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"The recognition of danger may prompt wise action.

A parent warning a child away from fire acts compassionately.

A physician explaining illness acts responsibly.

But deliberately magnifying fear beyond reality to secure obedience plants unwholesome karma.

The bodhisattva communicates clearly without manipulation."

He then recited:

Warn
Without exaggeration.

Teach
Without humiliation.

Protect
Without domination.

Thus courage

May arise naturally.

The vision deepened.

An elderly storyteller traveled among villages carrying two bags.

One contained frightening tales embellished with impossible details.

The other held true accounts of ordinary people practicing generosity under difficult conditions.

Whenever he told the terrifying stories, crowds gathered briefly before dispersing anxious and suspicious.

Whenever he recounted the quieter histories of courage, audiences became smaller but left inspired to assist neighbors.

Eventually he burned the first collection and spent the remainder of his life preserving the second.

When asked why, he answered:

"I have profited enough from shadows."

The Blessed One praised his renunciation.

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw an immense granary labeled **Security**.

Its keepers continually filled it with sacks marked **Anxiety**, believing fear itself would guarantee safety.

The building grew unstable under unnecessary weight.

Nearby another granary stored **Preparation**, **Generosity**, **Mutual Aid**, and **Mindfulness**.

Though less dramatic, it nourished the surrounding region through many difficult seasons.

The Buddha explained:

"Wise preparation differs from cultivated panic."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, how did the peoples formally abandon fear harvesting?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"They assembled before the Basin of Reflection and pronounced a solemn vow.

Each leader poured into the water a small vessel filled with dark sand representing inherited habits of manipulation.

As the grains touched the surface they dissolved completely.

Then each added clear water drawn from community wells maintained for all without distinction.

Thus they pledged to replace intimidation with service and secrecy with accountability."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the vision shifted once more.

Children born after this ceremony attended schools where the first lesson each year consisted of a single question:

"What grows when fear decreases?"

Some answered:

"Friendship."

Others:

"Learning."

Others:

"Trade."

Others:

"Music."

An old teacher nodded and wrote upon the board:

"Compassion makes room for all these."

The Blessed One smiled.

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The ancient instruments once used to amplify fearful signals across the deserts and valleys were gathered together in a great field.

Rather than destroying them, artisans transformed them into bells for monasteries, irrigation pipes for farms, musical instruments for festivals, and wind chimes for hospitals.

The metal remained.

Its purpose changed.

The Buddha explained:

"Transformation surpasses mere destruction.

Wisdom repurposes conditions toward liberation."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the entire assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Thus the peoples of Raktaloka renounced the Harvesting of Fear.

They discovered that confidence grows through honesty, that courage spreads through compassion, and that genuine authority rests not upon trembling subjects but upon mutual trust.

Whoever abandons manipulation and instead nurtures understanding enters the Bodhisattva Path.

This is the victory praised by all Buddhas."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Gather not

The harvest
Of panic.

Gather

The harvest
Of trust.

Store not

The grain
Of suspicion.

Store

The grain
Of generosity.

For fear
Consumes
Its keeper,

But compassion

Feeds worlds

Without end.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated unwavering resolve never to manipulate sentient beings through fear but always to cultivate clarity, courage, and loving-kindness.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over Abhirati.

The nāga kings cast away ancient symbols of domination and took up staffs carved with blue lotuses.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 60

The Great Confession

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Renunciation of Fear Harvesting had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, bowed respectfully before the World-Honored One, and asked:

"Blessed One, repentance has arisen among the rulers, and ancient habits have begun to fade. Yet true transformation requires not merely private regret but the clear acknowledgment of harm.

How did the peoples of Raktaloka undertake the Great Confession that purified their collective karma and renewed their commitment to the Bodhisattva Path?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, confession in the Dharma is not humiliation before another, nor the cultivation of despair.

It is the courageous unveiling of delusion before the mirror of wisdom.

One who confesses sincerely abandons concealment and becomes capable of genuine transformation.

Hear now of the Great Confession."

The assembly fell silent.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire ray that illuminated a vast plain where the descendants of the Amphibian Kings, the Desert Lords, and the Seven Houses gathered beneath the open sky.

No palace enclosed them.

No walls divided them.

No banners proclaimed superiority.

At the center stood only a great circular mirror fashioned from polished crystal, reflecting heaven and earth without preference.

The Blessed One declared:

"The mirror symbolizes Suchness, which neither accuses nor flatters."

Then he recited:

The mirror
Keeps no grudge.

Dust settles.

Dust is removed.

The mirror
Remains clear.

The vision shifted.

Before approaching the crystal mirror, each participant washed their hands in flowing water and bowed in the four directions, acknowledging gratitude toward teachers, parents, friends, strangers, and even adversaries who had become occasions for learning.

Only then did they step forward.

The first speaker was an elderly archivist.

She declared:

"Our ancestors preserved victories while omitting failures.

We confused selective memory with wisdom.

May future histories record both."

The assembly bowed.

The second was a merchant.

He confessed:

"I once exaggerated scarcity to enrich myself.

My wealth increased while trust diminished.

I return these gains for the common good."

He distributed his possessions among hospitals and granaries.

The people rejoiced.

The third was a retired magistrate.

"I punished quickly to appear decisive.

I listened too little.

May those after me judge more patiently."

His words inspired legal reforms throughout the region.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Specific confession nourishes specific transformation."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, why do beings fear admitting fault?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Because they confuse error with identity.

The deluded mind imagines:

'If I acknowledge wrongdoing, I become worthless.'

Wisdom understands:

'If I acknowledge wrongdoing, I become teachable.'

Thus confession liberates rather than diminishes."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The cracked vessel

Receives repair.

The hidden fracture

Widens unseen.

Reveal
What must heal.

The vision broadened.

Entire villages participated.

Teachers confessed moments of impatience.

Parents apologized to children for needless harshness.

Children apologized for dishonesty.

Artisans admitted careless workmanship.

Monastics acknowledged pride in spiritual accomplishments.

Rulers admitted neglect of distant provinces.

No one was compelled.

Those who spoke did so voluntarily.

Observers noticed that relationships strengthened rather than weakened.

The Blessed One declared:

"Truthfulness builds trust where concealment breeds fear."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld an immense tree covered with black leaves representing concealed guilt.

As each being spoke honestly, one leaf turned sapphire blue before drifting gently to the ground.

Soon the entire tree blossomed with flowers.

The Buddha explained:

"Confession changes not the past but the future arising from it."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

Among the gathered multitude stood an old woman carrying a tiny pouch.

When invited to confess, she opened it and revealed a single pebble.

"As a child," she said, "I stole this from my neighbor's garden and never returned it."

Many smiled kindly.

The neighbor, now equally elderly, laughed and embraced her.

"I forgot the pebble long ago."

She replied,

"I had not."

The Blessed One praised her.

"No burden is too small when sincerely released."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, should confession dwell endlessly upon past mistakes?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"No.

To cling to guilt after sincere amendment is another form of attachment.

The practitioner confesses, makes restitution where possible, learns, and proceeds with renewed diligence.

Otherwise remorse becomes self-centered rather than liberating."

He then recited:

Do not carry

Yesterday's ashes

As tomorrow's fuel.

Learn.

Repair.

Continue walking.

The vision deepened.

A council convened to review the inherited customs of the Red World.

Rather than condemning ancestors, participants examined conditions that had led to harmful choices.

Drought.

Scarcity.

Fear.

Pride.

Ignorance.

Competition.

Recognizing these causes, they resolved to cultivate opposite conditions:

Generosity.

Abundance through sharing.

Trust.

Humility.

Wisdom.

Cooperation.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Dependent origination guides ethical reform."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw innumerable scrolls listing grievances accumulated across generations.

People struggled beneath their weight.

An elderly monk approached carrying fire.

Instead of burning the records, he copied onto new parchment only the lessons learned and the reconciliations achieved.

The old scrolls crumbled naturally into fertile soil from which blue lotuses emerged.

The Buddha explained:

"Memory purified by wisdom becomes nourishment rather than poison."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what confession most pleased the Buddhas?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"One young apprentice approached the mirror and simply said:

'I do not yet understand my own mind, but I wish to learn.'

Such humility opens countless gates."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the vision shifted once more.

Following the ceremony, communities established annual Days of Reflection.

On these occasions no punishments were imposed.

People gathered to review intentions, acknowledge errors, express gratitude, and renew vows.

Children participated beside elders.

The atmosphere resembled neither trial nor spectacle but shared cultivation.

As generations passed, fear surrounding admission of mistakes gradually diminished.

Innovation increased.

Trust deepened.

Conflicts shortened.

The Blessed One praised this tradition.

Then another remarkable vision appeared.

The crystal mirror at the center of the plain slowly dissolved into clear water.

Participants saw not separate reflections but one shared sky appearing within every surface.

Some wept softly.

Others laughed.

All understood that while karma remained individual, awakening united beings through compassion.

The Buddha explained:

"The highest confession is the relinquishment of the illusion of separateness."

Finally Akṣobhya turned toward Sāgaramati and the entire assembly and declared:

"The Great Confession did not erase history.

It illuminated it.

The peoples of Raktaloka ceased defending inherited errors and instead transformed them into teachers.

Thus shame ripened into humility, humility into wisdom, wisdom into compassionate action.

Whoever follows this path need not fear truth, for truth joined with loving-kindness becomes medicine."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Confess

Without despair.

Listen

Without condemnation.

Forgive

Without forgetting wisdom.

Repair

Without seeking praise.

For the mirror

Never demanded
Perfection.

It asked only

That dust
No longer pretend

To be
The face.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated profound joy in truthful self-examination and the restoration of harmony through sincere acknowledgment of faults.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms across the fields of Abhirati.

The nāga kings bowed before the crystal lakes and renewed their vows of transparency and compassion.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati prostrated before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the whole assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 61

The Taking of the Bodhisattva Vow

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Great Confession had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his lotus seat, bowed respectfully before the World-Honored One, and asked:

"Blessed One, repentance purifies the heart and confession opens the way to transformation. Yet by what means did the descendants of the Red World firmly establish themselves upon the path of awakening?

How did they undertake the Bodhisattva Vow?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, remorse without aspiration looks backward alone.

Aspiration without remorse lacks depth.

When sincere repentance joins the vow to liberate all beings, the Bodhisattva Path begins in earnest.

Hear now of the Taking of the Bodhisattva Vow."

The assembly grew silent.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire ray that illuminated a great plateau beneath the crimson sky of Raktaloka.

Representatives of the Amphibian Kings, the Desert Lords, the Seven Houses, wandering monastics, artisans, farmers, healers, merchants, and children assembled together.

No distinction of rank determined where one stood.

The eldest sat beside the youngest.

The wealthy beside the poor.

Former rivals beside old enemies.

At the center burned no sacrificial fire.

Instead there stood a clear basin filled with still water reflecting the heavens.

The Blessed One declared:

"Water receives all without preference.

So too the Bodhisattva Vow."

Then he recited:

The rain

Falls equally

Upon cedar
And reed.

The vow

Extends equally

To friend
And stranger.

The vision shifted.

Before making any declaration, each participant approached the basin and looked into its surface.

They saw not merely their present form but countless former identities across beginningless saṃsāra.

Some beheld themselves as rulers.

Some as servants.

Some as merchants.

Some as scholars.

Some as animals.

Some as devas.

Some as wanderers without home.

Many recognized former adversaries among those standing beside them.

The illusion of permanent identity softened.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Memory purified by wisdom expands compassion."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, what words did they speak?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"They did not begin with promises of greatness.

They began with humility."

The first among them declared:

> "I have wandered through ignorance.
>
> I have benefited from kindness undeserved.
>
> I have caused suffering knowingly and unknowingly.

Therefore I dedicate whatever wisdom arises to
the liberation of all beings."

Others followed with similar sincerity.

No speech matched another exactly.

Yet every vow expressed the same intention.

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The words differ.

The heart
Unites them.

Many rivers.

One ocean.

Many vows.

One compassion.

The vision broadened.

A young apprentice hesitated at the edge of the gathering.

When encouraged to step forward, he confessed:

"I fear I am too ordinary for such a promise."

An elderly nun smiled kindly.

"The vow requires sincerity, not perfection."

The apprentice entered the circle.

Throughout later generations he became renowned not for miraculous powers but for repairing bridges connecting isolated villages.

Travelers called him the Bridge Bodhisattva.

The Blessed One praised him.

"The Bodhisattva Path begins where beings stand."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld innumerable lamps arranged across a dark plain.

Some burned brightly.

Others only faintly.

When each lamp attempted to illuminate the world alone, vast darkness remained.

But when all shone together, the night became gentle and navigable.

The Buddha explained:

"No single practitioner liberates all beings independently.

The saṅgha itself manifests compassion collectively."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

Among the descendants of the Desert Lords stood an aged commander whose earlier life had been shaped by warfare.

When invited to take the vow, he placed his sword upon the ground.

Rather than breaking it, village smiths later forged from its metal irrigation tools and plowshares.

The commander declared:

"May what once divided fields now nourish them."

The assembly bowed.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Transformation surpasses destruction."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, what obligations accompany the vow?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"They are without limit, yet may be summarized simply:

To cultivate generosity against greed.

Ethical conduct against exploitation.

Patience against hatred.

Joyful effort against discouragement.

Meditative stability against distraction.

Wisdom against ignorance.

And above all, to dedicate every wholesome act toward the liberation of all sentient beings."

The Blessed One recited:

When eating,

Remember
The hungry.

When studying,

Remember
The confused.

When resting,

Remember
The weary.

When awakening,

Awaken
For all.

The vision deepened.

After the vows had been spoken, no feast celebrated the occasion.

Instead participants dispersed quietly into neighboring communities.

Some repaired roads.

Some taught literacy.

Some dug wells.

Some cared for the sick.

Some reconciled feuding families.

Some planted orchards whose fruit they themselves would never harvest.

Observers later asked:

"When did the ceremony conclude?"

An old monk replied:

"It has not concluded."

The Blessed One praised these words.

"The true vow is enacted continuously."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw an immense book with blank pages stretching beyond sight.

Each compassionate deed written by any being appeared within it automatically.

No signatures accompanied the entries.

No rankings existed.

Only actions.

The Buddha explained:

"The Bodhisattva Vow concerns conduct more than reputation."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what if one breaks the vow through weakness?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Rise again.

Confess sincerely.

Learn carefully.

Resume practice immediately.

The danger lies not in stumbling but in refusing to continue walking.

Even the greatest bodhisattvas cultivated perfection through countless renewals."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the vision shifted once more.

Children born after the Great Confession participated in simple ceremonies each spring.

Holding blue lotus seeds, they repeated:

> "May whatever goodness grows in me become shade for another."

Afterward they planted the seeds in community gardens.

Years later those gardens fed strangers, pilgrims, and the poor.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Thus vows planted in childhood ripened through action."

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

Across the deserts, valleys, and hidden cities of the Red World appeared innumerable blue threads extending from the hearts of practitioners.

The threads intertwined until they formed a radiant net surrounding the planet.

Wherever suffering arose, the net gently carried compassion toward it.

No central authority directed its movement.

Interdependence itself guided the response.

The Buddha explained:

"This is the invisible community created by the Bodhisattva Vow."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the gathered assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Know therefore that the descendants of the Red World did not redeem themselves through secret knowledge, extraordinary powers, or domination over others.

They redeemed themselves by taking the immeasurable vow to labor for universal liberation.

Their former pride became humility.

Their secrecy became transparency.

Their fear became courage.

Their ambition became service.

Whoever generates bodhicitta in this manner immediately joins the lineage of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, regardless of birth, appearance, or former mistakes."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Vow not

To become
Greater.

Vow

To become
More useful.

Seek not

The highest seat.

Seek

The place
Where suffering waits.

For one sincere
Bodhisattva resolve

Transforms deserts
Into gardens,

Enemies
Into companions,

And wandering worlds

Into fields

Of awakening.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas throughout the ten directions renewed their own vows.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over Abhirati.

The nāga kings placed blue lotus garlands upon the crystal lakes.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the whole assembly rejoed in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 62

The Guardians of Humanity

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Taking of the Bodhisattva Vow had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his lotus seat, bowed deeply before the World-Honored One, and respectfully asked:

"Blessed One, after the descendants of the Red World had confessed their errors and generated bodhicitta, how did they thereafter relate to the Human Realm?

For formerly many sought advantage through domination and manipulation.

How did their conduct change once they entered the Great Vehicle?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, when ignorance governs the mind, beings ask,

'How may others serve me?'

When bodhicitta arises, they instead ask,

'How may I relieve the suffering of others?'

Thus those who once imagined themselves masters became willing servants.

Hear now of the Guardians of Humanity."

The assembly became silent with joyful expectation.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire ray that illuminated the worlds bordering the Human Realm.

The descendants of the ancient Serpent Houses no longer gathered in secret councils to pursue dominion.

Instead they assembled beneath open skies to consider where famine threatened, where conflict brewed, where disease spread, and where wisdom might quietly be encouraged.

No reward was expected.

The Blessed One declared:

"The highest guardianship preserves freedom rather than dependence."

Then he recited:

Protect

Without possessing.

Guide

Without controlling.

Teach

Without enslaving.

Serve

Without seeking
Praise.

The vision shifted.

A severe drought afflicted several distant provinces inhabited by humans.

Messengers carried conflicting reports.

Some proposed withholding assistance until political agreements could be secured.

An elderly practitioner descended from the Amphibian Kings stood and replied:

"Water should negotiate with no one."

He immediately organized caravans transporting irrigation tools, seeds, physicians, and engineers.

No banners accompanied them.

The recipients often never learned who had funded the effort.

When questioned afterward, the organizer answered:

"If thirst disappears, gratitude need not find an address."

The Blessed One praised him.

"Anonymous compassion preserves humility."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, how did they avoid repeating the errors of paternalism and domination?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"They learned to distinguish assistance from control.

The bodhisattva offers conditions favorable to awakening but does not seize another's agency.

One may illuminate the road without forcing another's footsteps."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Offer
The lamp.

Walk not
Another's journey.

Plant
The orchard.

Eat not
Another's harvest.

The vision broadened.

In one mountain region humans and descendants of the Red World collaborated to restore forests damaged by generations of neglect.

The former contributed botanical knowledge.

The latter contributed local experience.

Children from both communities planted saplings together.

When asked which group deserved greater credit, an old gardener laughed.

"The trees have not inquired."

The Buddha smiled.

"Thus interdependence surpasses rivalry."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld a great bridge spanning a deep canyon.

One side was labeled **Giving**.

The other **Receiving**.

Travelers crossing in either direction gradually discovered that halfway across the labels exchanged places.

The Blessed One explained:

"The one who serves is transformed by service.

The one who receives often grants opportunities for merit.

Neither stands permanently above the other."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A physician descended from the Desert Lords traveled among isolated villages treating illness without requesting payment.

When local leaders attempted to honor her with statues, she requested instead that every settlement train two apprentices in basic healing.

Years later hundreds practiced medicine because she had declined personal glory.

The Blessed One praised her discernment.

"Compassion seeks multiplication rather than memorialization."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, what of those humans who distrusted such assistance due to ancient memories?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Patience became their response.

Trust injured over generations heals gradually.

Therefore they neither demanded acceptance nor resented caution.

They continued serving quietly until conduct spoke more convincingly than promises."

He then recited:

The broken bridge

Requires many stones.

The broken trust

Requires many deeds.

Build patiently.

The vision deepened.

Several younger practitioners proposed intervening directly in every human conflict.

An elderly nun counseled restraint.

"If we solve every problem ourselves," she warned, "wisdom will not mature among those we intend to help."

Instead they offered mediation training, agricultural instruction, and schools emphasizing ethics and critical reflection.

Communities increasingly resolved disputes independently.

The Blessed One declared:

"The finest guardian cultivates capability rather than dependence."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw an immense tree shading a village.

Travelers praised the tree for its generosity.

The tree replied:

"I merely grew where conditions permitted."

Nearby gardeners quietly planted seeds so that future generations would enjoy similar shelter elsewhere.

The Buddha explained:

"True guardians create new guardians."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, may protection itself become attachment?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Indeed.

One may become attached to being needed.

One may secretly prefer another's weakness because it confirms one's own importance.

The bodhisattva instead rejoices when others surpass the teacher.

Freedom, not dependency, is the measure of compassionate success."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the vision shifted once more.

An orphan raised in a monastery eventually became chief engineer for a prosperous city.

Remembering earlier kindness, he designed roads, wells, schools, and public gardens accessible to all without fee.

Asked what inspired his public works, he answered:

"Someone protected me until I could protect others."

The Blessed One smiled.

"The chain of compassion lengthens through gratitude."

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The Human Realm appeared suspended beneath the night sky like a vast field awaiting rain.

Around it stood innumerable bodhisattvas, devas, nāgas, and awakened practitioners.

None grasped the earth.

None ruled it.

Each simply held a mirror reflecting its inherent Buddha-Nature back toward itself.

As humanity gradually perceived its own capacity for wisdom, the mirrors dissolved, no longer necessary.

The Buddha explained:

"The highest guardians disappear once beings recognize their own potential."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the gathered assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Thus those who once sought to guide humanity through fear became its quiet guardians through compassion.

They abandoned manipulation for encouragement, secrecy for transparency, superiority for fellowship, and domination for service.

The true guardian does not stand above another but beside another until confidence arises.

Then, without regret, the guardian steps aside."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Guard

The frightened

Until courage grows.

Guide

The lost

Until wisdom appears.

Shelter

The weary

Until strength returns.

Then release

Every claim

To ownership,

For the greatest protector

Is the one

Whose kindness

Leaves others

Freer

Than before.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated profound aspiration to protect all sentient beings without attachment or control.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over the jeweled plains of Abhirati.

The nāga kings renewed their vows to become guardians through humility and service alone.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 63

The Return to the Dharma

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Guardians of Humanity had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his lotus seat, arranged his robe over one shoulder, and bowed before the World-Honored One.

He asked:

"Blessed One, the descendants of the Red World have repented, confessed, renounced manipulation, undertaken the Bodhisattva Vow, and become protectors rather than exploiters.

Yet what does it truly mean to return to the Dharma?

Can one who has wandered through immeasurable error genuinely come home again?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, understand this well.

No sentient being ever departs entirely from Suchness.

Though obscured by ignorance, Buddha-Nature remains unstained.

To return to the Dharma is not to travel across space but to cease wandering in delusion.

It is the rediscovery of what has always been present."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire ray that illuminated innumerable worlds.

The assembly beheld travelers lost in dense forests.

Each wandered anxiously seeking roads.

Only later did they discover they had never left the mountain upon which their village stood.

Mist alone had hidden familiar paths.

The Blessed One declared:

"So too ignorance conceals but does not destroy awakening."

Then he recited:

The traveler

Returns not

By creating home,

But by recognizing it.

The vision shifted.

Among the descendants of the Serpent Houses arose a proposal to rebuild the ancient Crystal Kingdoms exactly as they had existed before decline.

Architects produced elaborate plans.

Historians debated forgotten measurements.

Treasuries accumulated resources.

An elderly monk quietly asked:

"Will rebuilding walls restore wisdom?"

Silence followed.

After reflection the councils changed course.

Rather than reconstructing monuments to vanished prestige, they established monasteries, libraries, hospitals, meditation gardens, and schools open to all.

The Blessed One smiled.

"They returned not to old architecture but to living Dharma."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, what signs reveal authentic return?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"When generosity replaces hoarding.

When listening replaces accusation.

When inquiry replaces certainty.

When humility replaces superiority.

When compassion extends beyond familiar boundaries.

These are milestones upon the road home."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The feet

Need not travel far.

Only the heart

Must change direction.

The vision broadened.

A famous artisan inherited fragments of shattered crystal recovered from buried cities.

Many urged him to fashion crowns for new rulers.

Instead he cut the crystals into thousands of small mirrors distributed freely to monasteries and schools.

On the back of each appeared the inscription:

"See clearly before judging."

Generations treasured these mirrors not as relics but as reminders of mindfulness.

The Blessed One praised the artisan.

"Broken pride became instruments of wisdom."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly saw a vast river flowing through many lands.

Some travelers believed it belonged exclusively to one village.

Others claimed ownership through conquest.

A child sitting upon the bank laughed softly.

"The river has continued flowing while you argued."

The Buddha explained:

"So too the Dharma neither belongs to nor excludes any people.

It is realized through practice."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A scholar descended from the Desert Lords spent decades collecting the histories of former conflicts.

When his work neared completion, he added one unexpected final chapter entitled:

Lessons Learned Through Error.

Students initially considered this section least important.

In time it became the most copied.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Wisdom often enters through honest revision."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, can one return to the Dharma without joining a monastery?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Certainly.

Some cultivate awakening while governing justly.

Others through healing the sick.

Others by teaching children.

Others by growing food honestly.

Others by repairing roads.

Others by practicing patient friendship.

External forms differ.

The essence remains the reduction of suffering through wisdom and compassion."

He then recited:

Sweep the floor

With mindfulness.

Teach the child

With kindness.

Harvest grain

Without greed.

In each

The Dharma
May flourish.

The vision deepened.

Communities throughout the Red World adopted a simple annual ritual.

At dawn they walked together beyond the town limits carrying empty bowls.

After a period of silent meditation they turned around and reentered through the same gate.

Visitors asked why they performed such an unusual procession.

The elders explained:

"We remind ourselves that returning requires changing intention, not geography."

The Blessed One praised the custom.

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly beheld seven travelers climbing different sides of a great mountain.

Each insisted their route alone reached the summit.

Mist concealed the upper slopes.

As they ascended higher, the paths gradually converged until all stood together beneath a single bodhi tree.

Looking back they laughed gently at earlier quarrels.

The Buddha explained:

"Skillful means differ according to conditions.

The fruits of wisdom reveal their underlying unity."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what obstacle most delays return?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"The belief that one is too far gone.

Despair masquerades as humility while secretly denying the transformative power of karma and bodhicitta.

The Buddhas never abandon beings.

Why then should beings abandon themselves?"

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

The Blessed One recited:

Do not say,

'I have wandered too long.'

The sunrise

Questions not

How dark
The night has been.

The vision shifted once more.

An elderly prison keeper spent much of his life administering severe punishments.

In retirement he volunteered teaching literacy to orphaned children.

One former prisoner encountered him years later and expressed gratitude rather than resentment.

Overcome with emotion, the old man whispered:

"I thought redemption belonged only to saints."

The former prisoner replied:

"Today you taught me otherwise."

The Blessed One praised both.

"Mutual transformation adorns the Dharma."

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The Red World itself appeared as a wandering pilgrim clothed in dust.

Across immeasurable kalpas it traveled through deserts, storms, triumphs, and ruin.

At last it arrived beside the tranquil lakes of Abhirati.

Removing its worn sandals, it gazed into the sapphire waters.

The dust settled naturally.

No gatekeeper demanded credentials.

No guardian questioned its worthiness.

The waters simply reflected its true face.

The Buddha explained:

"Such is the Return to the Dharma.

Nothing foreign is acquired.

Delusion falls away.

The original clarity appears."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the gathered assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"The peoples of the Red World returned to the Dharma not by recovering ancient empires nor by mastering hidden powers.

They returned by remembering generosity, restoring ethical conduct, cultivating meditation, realizing wisdom, confessing error, practicing compassion, and renewing bodhicitta.

Thus every step toward another's welfare became simultaneously a step home.

Know this and despair never."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

The road
Home

Begins

Where blame
Ends.

The gate
Home

Opens

Where pride
Falls.

The dwelling
Home

Appears

Where compassion
Abides.

Return therefore

Not to ashes,

But to wisdom.

Not to monuments,

But to kindness.

Not to yesterday,

But to Suchness

Present

In this very breath.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas attained deeper confidence in the inexhaustible possibility of return for all sentient beings.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms throughout Abhirati.

The nāga kings bowed until their jeweled crowns touched the ground.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati prostrated before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the whole assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book VIII — The Conversion of the Serpents

Chapter 64

The Pure Land Aspiration

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the stainless and incomparable Buddha-field of Abhirati, where the jeweled earth shone like polished sapphire and every breeze carried the fragrance of wisdom and compassion.

When the teaching concerning the Return to the Dharma had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, placed his palms together, and bowed before the World-Honored One.

He respectfully asked:

"Blessed One, the peoples of the Red World have confessed their errors, cultivated humility, renounced fear, undertaken the Bodhisattva Vow, and returned to the Dharma.

Toward what should they now direct their deepest aspiration?

Should they seek merely fortunate rebirth, or should they set their minds upon the Pure Land itself?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Excellent, excellent, Sāgaramati.

The aspiration for a Pure Land is not the rejection of the world but the determination to cultivate conditions most favorable for awakening and the liberation of all beings.

One who aspires sincerely toward Abhirati while practicing generosity, ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom plants immeasurable wholesome roots.

Hear now of the Pure Land Aspiration."

The entire assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One emitted a boundless sapphire radiance.

Instantly the assembled multitude beheld Abhirati not merely as a place beyond ordinary perception but as a living manifestation of awakened intention.

Its lakes reflected minds without distortion.

Its trees bore fruits according to wholesome aspiration.

Its pathways adjusted themselves so that no traveler became lost.

Birds sang teachings on dependent origination.

Gentle winds whispered the Perfection of Wisdom.

No being there sought advantage over another.

The Blessed One declared:

"Abhirati arises through the fulfillment of vast vows and the purification of mind."

Then he recited:

The Pure Land

Is not reached

By distance alone,

But by direction

Of heart.

The vision shifted.

The descendants of the Red World gathered upon the high plateaus overlooking ancient deserts.

No longer did they speak of reclaiming former empires.

Instead they contemplated what kind of world would most assist beings in cultivating awakening.

Some proposed magnificent cities.

Others abundant wealth.

An elderly gardener quietly suggested:

"Let every child have a teacher.

Let every traveler find water.

Let every elder receive care.

Let every dispute seek reconciliation before violence.

Such a land would resemble Abhirati."

The assembly approved unanimously.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Pure Lands begin as aspirations embodied through conduct."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, is rebirth in Abhirati granted by wish alone?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"No.

Aspiration unsupported by practice resembles a farmer praising harvest while refusing to sow seed.

Faith should inspire ethical conduct.

Ethical conduct supports meditation.

Meditation nourishes wisdom.

Wisdom strengthens compassion.

Compassion perfects aspiration.

Thus causes and conditions mature together."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Long not merely

For the distant shore.

Build also

The boat.

The vision broadened.

Among the descendants of the Amphibian Kings arose a custom called the Mirror Offering.

Each household kept a polished blue mirror.

Before sleeping, family members quietly asked themselves:

Did I today make the world more similar to Abhirati or more similar to confusion?

No public records were kept.

No penalties imposed.

The practice gradually transformed domestic life.

Parents apologized more readily.

Children learned honesty without fear.

Neighbors settled disagreements before resentment deepened.

The Blessed One praised the custom.

"The mirror of conscience requires no audience."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld a caravan traveling through a vast desert toward a distant oasis.

Some pilgrims became discouraged because the destination remained unseen.

A wise guide instructed them to carry water not only for themselves but also for strangers encountered along the road.

Unexpectedly the caravan itself became an oasis wherever it paused.

The Buddha explained:

"One who embodies Pure Land qualities already participates in their realization."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A humble potter spent decades crafting bowls for monasteries and public kitchens.

Each bowl bore a tiny inscription beneath its base invisible during ordinary use:

"May whoever eats from this vessel awaken."

Long after the artisan's death, thousands unknowingly received nourishment accompanied by that silent aspiration.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Hidden vows shape unseen futures."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, what distinguishes aspiration from attachment?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Attachment demands outcomes according to self-centered preference.

Aspiration offers wholesome intention while accepting dependent origination.

The bodhisattva strives diligently yet remains free from despair if results unfold gradually.

Thus aspiration and equanimity mature together."

He then recited:

Plant deeply.

Water faithfully.

Wait patiently.

The lotus

Consults no clock.

The vision deepened.

Communities across the Red World gradually adopted annual Festivals of the Blue Lotus.

Instead of military parades or displays of wealth, citizens celebrated acts of generosity completed during the previous year.

Engineers who repaired bridges marched beside musicians who comforted mourners.

Teachers walked beside farmers.

Children honored elders.

Former enemies shared meals.

Visitors remarked that no victor stood above the crowd.

An old woman replied:

"We celebrate causes, not conquerors."

The Blessed One praised this transformation.

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw innumerable blue lotus seeds drifting through space between worlds.

Whenever beings generated sincere bodhicitta and dedicated merit toward rebirth in Abhirati for the sake of all sentient beings, one seed descended into the stream of consciousness.

Some blossomed immediately at life's end.

Others ripened over many lives.

None were lost.

The Buddha explained:

"No wholesome aspiration disappears."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what becomes of one reborn in Abhirati?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Such beings encounter conditions exceptionally favorable to continued practice.

The Dharma is continually heard.

Wise companions abound.

Distractions are few.

Yet even there the highest joy consists not in personal peace but in perfecting compassion until all realms benefit."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the vision shifted once more.

The former rulers of the Serpent Houses gathered before dawn facing the eastern sky.

Removing their ceremonial ornaments, they planted blue lotuses around an ordinary village well.

When questioned why they chose such a modest place rather than palace grounds, they replied:

"Pilgrims need water before symbolism."

Their answer spread widely and became proverbial.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Utility offered compassionately surpasses display."

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The entire Red World appeared suspended within limitless space.

From every sincere act of generosity, every confession honestly made, every reconciliation achieved, every child instructed patiently, every fear relinquished, and every Bodhisattva Vow renewed, a ray of sapphire light ascended toward Abhirati.

At first the rays were few.

Then they multiplied beyond counting until a luminous bridge stretched between the suffering world and the Buddha-field of Imperturbable Suchness.

Yet the bridge reached in both directions.

From Abhirati streamed back wisdom, courage, and compassionate inspiration into the hearts of practitioners still dwelling amid ordinary life.

The Blessed One explained:

"Thus aspiration and practice sustain one another.

The Pure Land is approached not through escape from beings but through deeper dedication to their welfare."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the gathered assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Therefore let all descendants of the Red World, and indeed all sentient beings throughout the ten directions, generate this aspiration:

'May I cultivate the causes leading toward rebirth in the Pure Land of Abhirati under the guidance of Akṣobhya Tathāgata.

May whatever merit I acquire become the property of all beings.

May I return again and again to worlds of suffering until every last traveler discovers the path beyond fear and delusion.'

Whoever maintains such intention together with ethical conduct, meditation, wisdom, and boundless compassion walks the path praised by all Buddhas."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Aspire

Beyond yourself.

Practice

Within yourself.

Dedicate

Beyond measure.

Serve

Without fatigue.

For the road

To Abhirati

Is paved

With ordinary kindness

Repeated faithfully

Until even deserts

Bloom

With sapphire lotuses.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated vast aspirations for rebirth in Abhirati for the benefit of all beings.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms across the jeweled fields.

The nāga kings renewed their vows before the crystal lakes.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the whole assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 65

The Decline of the Fear Empire

Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed Akṣobhya, the Tathāgata of Imperturbable Suchness, was dwelling in the unsurpassed Pure Land of Abhirati, surrounded by immeasurable hosts of bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, and countless beings who had assembled from worlds throughout the ten directions.

When the discourse concerning the Pure Land Aspiration had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, placed his palms together, and bowed respectfully before the World-Honored One.

He then addressed the Blessed One:

"World-Honored One, throughout this sacred history we have heard how ignorance gave rise to domination, how fear was cultivated for power, and how many eventually repented and returned to the Dharma. Yet traces of delusion remain throughout the worlds.

Tell us, Blessed One: by what causes does the Empire of Fear finally decline?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, understand that the Empire of Fear possesses no permanent palace, no eternal sovereign, and no indestructible foundation.

Its walls are woven from ignorance.

Its soldiers are unexamined assumptions.

Its treasury consists of attachment.

Its banners are raised by craving.

Whenever wisdom appears, its borders recede.

Hear now the teaching of the Decline of the Fear Empire."

The assembly became perfectly silent.

Then the Blessed One emitted a brilliant sapphire radiance that illuminated innumerable future kalpas.

The assembly beheld kingdoms rising and falling, cities flourishing and fading, civilizations advancing and declining according to karma and conditions.

Throughout these changing ages one pattern repeated itself.

Communities ruled primarily through intimidation appeared formidable for a time.

Yet beneath outward order resentment accumulated like water behind a cracked dam.

By contrast, communities grounded in trust, generosity, and justice often advanced more slowly but endured with remarkable resilience.

The Blessed One declared:

"Fear compels obedience for a season.

Confidence nurtures harmony across generations."

Then he recited:

The fortress
Built upon terror

Requires
Constant repair.

The cottage
Built upon trust

Endures storms
Unexpectedly well.

The vision shifted.

In one prosperous realm a ruler sought absolute certainty.

Every criticism became treason.

Every question became suspicion.

Every disagreement became disloyalty.

At first public silence increased.

The ruler celebrated this as unity.

Yet beneath the silence honest counsel disappeared.

Errors multiplied because no one dared identify them.

Harvests failed through neglected maintenance.

Bridges collapsed from ignored warnings.

At last the ruler wandered alone through empty halls
wondering why loyalty had vanished.

The Blessed One observed:

"Fear silences not only opposition but also wisdom."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, why do some cling to fear even after seeing its consequences?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Because fear promises control.

The deluded mind prefers anxious certainty to compassionate uncertainty.

The practitioner instead accepts impermanence and responds with mindfulness."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The clenched fist

Grasps little.

The open hand

Receives much.

Release first

The illusion
Of control.

The vision broadened.

Among the descendants of the redeemed Serpent Houses arose teachers who traveled quietly through many lands.

They carried no weapons and demanded no allegiance.

Their principal instruction consisted of three questions asked before every public meeting:

What are we afraid of?

Is that fear completely accurate?

How may compassion respond wisely?

Entire villages transformed through repeated contemplation of these inquiries.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Questions honestly pursued become medicine."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly saw an immense palace built entirely from black ice.

Its towers reflected frightening images into the surrounding countryside.

Travelers fled in panic.

Yet when the morning sun rose, the palace slowly melted until only clear water remained.

Children played happily where armies had once assembled.

The Buddha explained:

"The Empire of Fear depends upon conditions.

When conditions change, its apparent permanence dissolves."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A historian studied many fallen civilizations.

Searching for a common cause, she expected to find invading armies or natural disasters.

Instead she discovered repeated patterns of dishonesty, arrogance, disregard for ordinary people, and the gradual erosion of trust.

Publishing her findings, she concluded:

"No empire collapses solely from outside while integrity remains within."

The Blessed One praised her discernment.

"Internal karma matures externally."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, may fear ever disappear completely from conditioned existence?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"As long as ignorance persists, fear will arise.

The objective is not to abolish biological caution or prudent awareness but to free the mind from domination by imagined catastrophes and self-centered attachment.

Even awakened beings step aside from falling stones.

Wisdom distinguishes danger from panic."

The Blessed One recited:

See the cliff.

Step carefully.

See the storm.

Build shelter.

But invent not

Additional thunder

Within the mind.

The vision deepened.

In a remote monastery novices undertook an unusual exercise.

Each entered a dark room carrying a small lamp.

Many expected frightening apparitions.

Instead they discovered only ordinary furniture casting exaggerated shadows.

Upon returning they laughed at their earlier assumptions.

The abbot explained:

"Much of practice consists in bringing light where imagination projected monsters."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The Fear Empire appeared as an enormous marketplace where merchants sold invisible chains.

Customers purchased them eagerly and fastened them around their own wrists.

Nearby bodhisattvas quietly distributed keys without charge.

Many ignored the gift.

Some accepted but delayed using it.

Others immediately unlocked themselves and began assisting neighbors.

The Blessed One explained:

"The Dharma cannot compel liberation.

It offers means."

The vision shifted once more.

Generations after the Great Confession, annual commemorations no longer celebrated military victories.

Instead communities recited stories of reconciled enemies, honest admissions of fault, successful mediation, patient teachers, and courageous healers.

Children gradually found tales of intimidation dull compared to accounts of compassion.

Without public admiration, fear-based leadership lost much of its appeal.

The Buddha smiled.

"Cultures transform through the stories they preserve."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, what marks the beginning of the Fear Empire's final decline?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"When ordinary people cease believing that cruelty is strength.

When humility becomes honorable.

When cooperation earns greater esteem than domination.

When listening surpasses shouting.

When generosity appears more admirable than accumulation.

At that moment the empire has already begun to crumble, though its ruins may remain visible for some time."

The devas showered sapphire blossoms through the air.

Finally the Blessed One manifested one last symbolic vision.

The entire Empire of Fear appeared as a colossal fortress surrounded by walls seemingly reaching the heavens.

Its gates were locked.

Its banners proclaimed invincibility.

Yet beneath its foundations countless tiny blue lotuses quietly grew.

Season after season their roots widened hidden cracks.

Rain entered.

Light penetrated.

Birds nested in abandoned towers.

Children planted gardens in former courtyards.

One morning the fortress simply opened into a public park where travelers shared food beneath flowering trees.

No battle had occurred.

Transformation had rendered conquest unnecessary.

The Buddha explained:

"This is the highest victory.

The enemies are not annihilated.

The conditions giving rise to enmity are patiently replaced."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Therefore know that the Empire of Fear declines not chiefly through force of arms but through the cumulative power of wisdom, ethical conduct, truthful speech, meditation, generosity, repentance, and bodhicitta practiced consistently by innumerable beings.

Every act of sincere compassion removes one stone from its walls.

Every moment of mindful awareness extinguishes one torch of delusion.

Every reconciliation weakens one gate.

Thus the decline proceeds quietly until one day beings realize that the prison was never as permanent as they imagined."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Fear builds

With haste.

Compassion builds

With patience.

Fear commands

For a lifetime.

Wisdom teaches

For countless kalpas.

Therefore remove

One stone
Of ignorance today,

Plant

One lotus
Of kindness today,

And the greatest empire

Founded upon delusion

Will pass away

Like frost

Before

The morning sun.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas attained deeper confidence that even the most entrenched patterns of suffering could be transformed through steadfast practice.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over the jeweled fields of Abhirati.

The nāga kings renewed their vows to uproot fear through wisdom and loving-kindness.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the whole assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 66

The Awakening of Human Consciousness

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the inconceivable Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Decline of the Fear Empire had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, bowed before the World-Honored One, and respectfully asked:

"Blessed One, if the Empire of Fear declines through the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, what follows thereafter?

How do ordinary beings awaken from inherited habits of ignorance?

How does human consciousness mature toward the realization of Buddha-Nature?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, awakening is seldom sudden for entire civilizations.

Just as dawn spreads gradually across valleys before illuminating mountain peaks, so too collective wisdom unfolds through countless acts of generosity, inquiry, ethical conduct, and meditation.

Hear now the teaching concerning the Awakening of Human Consciousness."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One emitted a boundless sapphire radiance that illuminated innumerable future ages.

The assembly beheld humanity dwelling in villages, cities, forests, mountains, islands, and deserts.

Many continued to experience sorrow, illness, conflict, and uncertainty.

Yet a subtle transformation had begun.

People increasingly paused before reacting.

Questions replaced assumptions.

Listening preceded accusation.

Children were taught not merely what to think but how to examine experience with mindfulness.

The Blessed One declared:

"The first sign of awakening is sincere curiosity free from hostility."

Then he recited:

The closed hand

Defends opinions.

The open hand

Receives understanding.

Likewise

The open mind

Receives wisdom.

The vision shifted.

In one village a dispute arose concerning the use of scarce water during a dry season.

Previous generations would have resorted quickly to violence.

Instead the youngest apprentice suggested inviting all affected families to meditate together in silence before negotiation.

Many objected.

Nevertheless they agreed.

After an hour of quiet reflection, anger softened.

Solutions previously unseen became obvious.

Additional wells were dug.

Consumption adjusted voluntarily.

The conflict dissolved without bloodshed.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Mindfulness often reveals possibilities hidden by agitation."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, what awakens consciousness most effectively?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Many causes cooperate.

Suffering prompts inquiry.

Kindness inspires gratitude.

Meditation clarifies perception.

Study refines understanding.

Friendship encourages perseverance.

The Dharma blossoms where these conditions meet."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Many rains

Feed one river.

Many virtues

Support awakening.

Despise therefore

No wholesome cause.

The vision broadened.

Throughout the Human Realm schools gradually adopted a simple morning practice.

Before beginning lessons, students sat quietly for several breaths while contemplating three questions:

What am I experiencing?

What are others experiencing?

How may today's actions reduce suffering?

Teachers observed remarkable changes.

Bullying declined.

Cooperation increased.

Academic achievement improved because attention became steadier.

Parents requested instruction as well.

Communities flourished.

The Blessed One praised these developments.

"The disciplined mind learns more deeply."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld an immense library containing countless books.

Visitors rushed anxiously from shelf to shelf accumulating knowledge.

One elderly gardener entered carrying only a watering can.

Instead of reading immediately, he cared for the neglected plants growing beside the windows.

After several weeks he opened a single volume and understood it completely.

The Buddha explained:

"Wisdom digests information through practice."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

Among the descendants of the redeemed Serpent Houses traveled contemplative artisans who constructed public gardens in crowded cities.

Within each garden no buying or selling occurred.

People of every background simply rested among trees, ponds, and blue lotuses.

Many arrived burdened by anxiety.

Most departed calmer than before.

One visitor remarked:

"I solved a problem today without anyone advising me."

The gardener replied:

"Still water reflects clearly."

The Blessed One smiled.

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, can technological advancement alone awaken consciousness?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"No.

Tools amplify intention.

An untrained mind wielding marvelous instruments may multiply confusion.

A compassionate mind employs even simple implements skillfully.

Therefore inner cultivation must accompany outer development."

He then recited:

A sharper blade

Does not choose

Its purpose.

The hand

Must first

Learn kindness.

The vision deepened.

A renowned mathematician spent decades calculating the movements of stars.

Late in life she began volunteering at a hospice caring for the dying.

When questioned about this change, she answered:

"I measured the heavens.

Now I wish to measure compassion."

Her students inherited both pursuits.

The Blessed One praised her integration.

"Knowledge and loving-kindness should illuminate one another."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw humanity wandering through an enormous maze whose walls were inscribed with labels:

Nation.

Status.

Profession.

Ideology.

Lineage.

Achievement.

Travelers argued passionately over which corridor mattered most.

A child quietly climbed a tree growing within the maze and observed the paths from above.

Descending, the child remarked:

"The exits connect."

Many followed.

The Buddha explained:

"Conventional distinctions serve practical purposes but need not imprison perception."

The vision shifted once more.

Communities inspired by the Bodhisattva Path began celebrating annual Festivals of Questions rather than Festivals of Certainty.

Citizens gathered to discuss unresolved ethical dilemmas with humility.

The wisest participants often admitted ignorance most readily.

Unexpected innovations emerged from these conversations.

The culture increasingly valued thoughtful inquiry over rigid dogmatism.

The Blessed One declared:

"Confidence and intellectual humility coexist peacefully."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, how shall future generations recognize awakening within themselves?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"Observe whether compassion expands.

Notice whether resentment diminishes.

See whether joy in another's welfare increases.

Examine whether fear governs decisions less frequently.

If these qualities mature, awakening proceeds even without extraordinary experiences."

The Blessed One recited:

Seek not first

Visions.

Seek

Patience.

Seek not first

Marvels.

Seek

Integrity.

The vision expanded further.

The assembly beheld hospitals where physicians meditated before surgery, schools where teachers practiced generosity before instruction, marketplaces where merchants reflected upon fairness before negotiation, courts where judges spent moments in silent mindfulness before rendering verdicts, and homes where families concluded each day expressing gratitude and reconciliation.

No institution became perfect.

Yet each gradually oriented itself toward reducing suffering.

The Buddha smiled.

"Collective awakening expresses itself through ordinary routines transformed by wisdom."

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The Human Realm appeared at night beneath a vast sky.

For ages only isolated lamps glowed.

Then one household lit another.

One monastery another.

One village another.

One traveler another.

Soon entire continents shimmered with gentle blue light.

Seen from Abhirati, the earth resembled a field of sapphire lotuses opening simultaneously beneath the stars.

The Blessed One explained:

"This is the Awakening of Human Consciousness.

Not the triumph of one people over another.

Not the victory of hidden rulers.

But the gradual realization by innumerable ordinary beings that wisdom, compassion, and interdependence constitute their true inheritance.

As this understanding spreads, the distinction between helper and helped, teacher and student, guardian and protected becomes increasingly transparent.

All advance together upon the Bodhisattva Path."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the gathered assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Therefore despair not when ignorance seems widespread.

One mindful breath interrupts habit.

One act of forgiveness alters generations.

One honest question opens countless doors.

One child taught compassion reshapes the future.

Thus consciousness awakens not by force but by the patient accumulation of wholesome causes throughout immeasurable kalpas."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Wake gently.

Wake daily.

Wake others

By example.

For the sun

Does not shout

At the night.

It simply rises,

And darkness

Finds

No place

To remain.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated profound confidence in the universal capacity for awakening inherent in all sentient beings.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms throughout Abhirati.

The nāga kings renewed their vows to encourage wisdom through humble service.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 67

The Shattering of the Masks

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the inconceivable Buddha-field of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Awakening of Human Consciousness had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his lotus seat, bowed deeply before the World-Honored One, and respectfully inquired:

"Blessed One, as beings awaken and fear declines, many identities once assumed with great seriousness begin to lose their hold. The old allegories speak of the Shattering of the Masks.

What are these masks, and how are they relinquished without falling into confusion or nihilism?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, the masks are not faces but attachments.

They are the temporary identities fashioned by ignorance and grasped as permanent realities.

Beings say, 'This alone is who I am,' and from that attachment arise pride, shame, conflict, and fear.

The Bodhisattva does not destroy conventional identities but sees through their emptiness.

Thus the mask may remain useful while no longer imprisoning the wearer."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire radiance that illuminated innumerable worlds.

The assembly beheld actors performing upon a magnificent stage.

Each wore a finely crafted mask representing an occupation or role.

One mask bore the likeness of a ruler.

Another a scholar.

Another a merchant.

Another a laborer.

Another a monk.

Another a warrior.

Another a healer.

When the play ended, the actors removed their masks, bowed to one another, and shared a simple meal without distinction.

The Blessed One declared:

"So too are the identities of saṃsāra—functional within convention, empty in ultimate nature."

Then he recited:

Wear the mask

When compassion
Requires it.

Remove the mask

When wisdom
Recognizes it.

Never mistake

The costume

For the actor.

The vision shifted.

In a prosperous city there lived a judge celebrated for flawless legal reasoning.

Over time he became convinced that his title alone defined him.

One year illness forced him into retirement.

Without his office he experienced despair, believing himself worthless.

An old gardener invited him to assist in cultivating blue lotuses.

At first the former judge complained that he knew nothing of soil.

The gardener smiled.

"You already know fairness.

Plants appreciate consistency."

Months later the retired magistrate discovered unexpected peace.

He realized that integrity had mattered more than position.

The Blessed One praised his awakening.

"The Dharma liberates qualities from labels."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, if identities are empty, should all distinctions be abandoned?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"No.

Conventional designations facilitate communication and responsibility.

Parents care for children.

Teachers instruct students.

Physicians heal patients.

These functions remain valuable.

The error lies in imagining such roles possess independent, permanent essence."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Call the river

By any name.

Still it flows.

Call the healer

By any title.

Still compassion
Treats the wound.

The vision broadened.

Communities throughout the Human Realm adopted a remarkable annual observance known as the Day Without Titles.

For one day each year no person was addressed by rank, profession, wealth, lineage, or honorific.

Everyone prepared food, cleaned public spaces, and shared labor together.

The highest officials swept streets beside children.

Renowned scholars carried water.

Artisans instructed nobles in ordinary crafts.

Many discovered unexpected friendships.

When the festival concluded, responsibilities resumed, yet attachment to status had diminished.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Temporary equality reveals enduring interdependence."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly saw a vast hall lined with crystal masks of every imaginable description.

Some glittered with jewels.

Others appeared plain.

Visitors eagerly competed for the finest examples.

An elderly nun quietly walked through the hall carrying no mask at all.

When asked which identity she preferred, she replied:

"Whichever reduces suffering."

The masks gradually dissolved into light.

The Buddha explained:

"Flexibility guided by compassion surpasses rigid self-definition."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A young apprentice proudly announced:

"I belong to the noblest lineage."

His teacher handed him a bowl and instructed him to gather water from seven wells.

Upon returning, the teacher asked him to identify which drop came from which source.

The apprentice admitted his inability.

The teacher smiled gently.

"Dependent origination mingles all streams."

The Blessed One praised the lesson.

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, what of those who cling fiercely to old identities out of fear?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"They deserve patience rather than contempt.

One who has worn a heavy garment for many years may hesitate before setting it aside.

Offer understanding.

Demonstrate freedom through conduct.

Never shatter another's mask violently.

Invite gentle removal."

He then recited:

The fruit

Falls naturally

When ripe.

Pull too soon,

And bitterness
Remains.

The vision deepened.

Among the redeemed descendants of the Red World arose a custom in their schools.

Students were periodically assigned unfamiliar responsibilities.

Future physicians learned farming.

Future engineers studied poetry.

Future rulers practiced cleaning public roads.

Future merchants volunteered in hospices.

By experiencing diverse perspectives, arrogance diminished.

Graduates became renowned for balanced judgment.

The Blessed One declared:

"Empathy is the wisdom born of exchanging masks."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly beheld a great mountain covered with colored banners representing philosophies, nations, schools, traditions, and communities.

Travelers argued endlessly over which banner crowned the summit.

A child quietly climbed above them all and discovered that the wind moved every flag equally.

Descending, the child remarked:

"The mountain supports every banner without becoming any of them."

The Buddha explained:

"So too Suchness supports all phenomena while remaining unconfined."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what mask proves most difficult to relinquish?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"The notion of an inherently separate self.

As long as beings cling to an independently existing identity, subtler attachments continually arise.

Seeing through this illusion does not erase personality or compassion.

Rather, it frees them from fear."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

The Blessed One recited:

Lose not

Your uniqueness.

Lose

Your isolation.

Abandon not

Character.

Abandon

Self-grasping.

The vision shifted once more.

An old actor nearing the end of life gathered every mask he had worn upon the stage.

Kings.

Beggars.

Saints.

Criminals.

Merchants.

Ascetics.

He arranged them carefully around a bodhi tree and sat quietly in meditation.

When dawn arrived, dew collected upon every face equally.

Seeing this, his grandchildren understood without explanation that all roles arise and pass while awareness remains open and luminous.

The Blessed One smiled.

Then he manifested one final symbolic vision.

The entire Human Realm appeared covered by translucent masks fashioned from crystal.

Whenever a being performed an act of genuine generosity without expectation of reward, a tiny crack appeared.

Whenever forgiveness overcame resentment, another crack formed.

Whenever wisdom dissolved prejudice, another.

Eventually the masks fragmented into countless sparkling pieces that fell harmlessly to the earth and transformed into blue lotus petals.

Beneath every shattered covering shone the same clear capacity for awakening—the luminous Buddha-Nature present from beginningless time.

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly, Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"Thus the Shattering of the Masks is not the destruction of culture, vocation, or ordinary convention.

It is the dissolution of delusion concerning permanence and separateness.

The Bodhisattva continues to play many roles but clings to none.

Today teacher, tomorrow student.

Today giver, tomorrow receiver.

Today leader, tomorrow servant.

Understanding this, one moves freely throughout saṃsāra for the benefit of all beings.

Such flexibility is called Mirror-Like Wisdom."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Wear kindness

As your garment.

Wear patience

As your ornament.

Wear wisdom

As your mirror.

And let every mask

That conceals
Compassion

Fall away

Like autumn leaves

Making room

For the blue lotus

Already blooming

Within.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas attained profound realization of non-self and the skillful use of conventional identities without attachment.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over the jeweled fields of Abhirati.

The nāga kings laid aside ceremonial crowns and bowed with uncovered heads before the Buddha.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati prostrated before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the whole assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 68

The Universal Buddha-Nature

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the inconceivable Pure Land of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Shattering of the Masks had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, bowed deeply before the World-Honored One, and respectfully asked:

"Blessed One, if the masks of self-clinging fall away and beings awaken to emptiness, what then is revealed?

Do all sentient beings truly possess the capacity for Buddhahood, even those who have wandered through ages of ignorance, violence, fear, and delusion?

Do humans, nāgas, devas, animals, and the descendants of the Red World alike share this potential?"

The Blessed One smiled with immeasurable compassion and replied:

"Sāgaramati, listen carefully and hold these words well.

The sun does not choose where to shine.

The rain does not inquire concerning lineage before it falls.

Likewise, Buddha-Nature is not bestowed as a reward nor withheld as punishment.

It is the luminous potential for awakening present within all sentient beings, though obscured by adventitious defilements.

Just as a sapphire covered in mud does not cease to be a sapphire, so too a mind obscured by greed, hatred, and delusion never loses its capacity for awakening."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the Blessed One emitted a ray of blue light that spread throughout immeasurable Buddha-fields.

The assembly beheld beings of every conceivable form: devas adorned with celestial ornaments, nāgas dwelling in jeweled palaces beneath lakes, yakṣas roaming mountain forests, gandharvas playing heavenly music, humans engaged in ordinary labor, animals wandering plains and seas, and even tormented beings burdened by the consequences of unwholesome karma.

Though their appearances differed beyond measure, within each shone a tiny sapphire flame, steady and indestructible.

The Blessed One declared:

"This flame symbolizes not a separate soul or permanent self, but the ever-present possibility of awakening through the realization of Suchness."

Then he recited:

Clouds conceal

The moon.

Yet the moon

Remains untouched.

So too

Ignorance conceals

Wisdom,

But cannot
Destroy it.

The vision shifted.

A wandering sculptor discovered an enormous block of rough stone abandoned in a quarry.

Observers dismissed it as worthless.

The sculptor bowed respectfully before beginning work.

Months later an exquisite image of a seated Buddha emerged.

When admirers praised his skill, he answered:

"I removed only what concealed the form already waiting within."

The Blessed One smiled.

"So too the Dharma removes obscurations rather than manufacturing enlightenment."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, if Buddha-Nature is universal, why do beings differ so greatly in conduct and understanding?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Because causes and conditions differ.

One seed falls in fertile soil.

Another beneath rock.

Another in drought.

Another beside abundant water.

Their present conditions vary, yet each retains the capacity to sprout when supporting causes arise.

Therefore never mistake temporary circumstance for ultimate potential."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Judge not

The sleeping seed

By winter's field.

Wait patiently

For spring.

The vision broadened.

The descendants of the redeemed Serpent Houses established schools open to every child regardless of ancestry, occupation, or wealth.

At the entrance stood a single inscription:

'Assume wisdom is possible in every student.'

Many considered the policy impractical.

Yet over generations extraordinary teachers, physicians, philosophers, artisans, and contemplatives emerged from backgrounds previously neglected.

The schools became renowned throughout neighboring realms.

The Buddha praised them.

"Expectation rooted in compassion invites dormant virtue to blossom."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld an immense jewel buried beneath countless layers of clay.

Some observers insisted only the dirt existed.

Others worshiped the dirt itself.

An old woman quietly washed the object in a nearby stream until its brilliance became obvious.

She neither created nor imported the jewel.

She simply removed obscuration.

The Blessed One explained:

"The Dharma cleanses perception."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A monk encountered a violent bandit hiding in the mountains.

Many urged immediate execution.

Instead the monk requested permission to share a meal.

Suspicious but curious, the bandit accepted.

Over many months conversation gradually replaced hostility.

Eventually the outlaw surrendered stolen goods, sought forgiveness from those he had harmed, and devoted the remainder of his life to repairing roads through dangerous passes.

When asked what changed him, he answered:

"Someone believed I could become different before I believed it myself."

The Blessed One praised this transformation.

"Confidence in Buddha-Nature often precedes visible evidence."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, can one ever completely lose access to this potential?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"No.

Though beings may wander through immeasurable kalpas of delusion, wholesome roots can again be nourished.

The path may become long, but awakening remains possible.

Therefore the bodhisattva abandons despair regarding any sentient being."

He then recited:

The ocean

Rejects no river.

The sky

Rejects no bird.

Compassion

Rejects no being.

The vision deepened.

Within a remote monastery novices received an unusual assignment.

Each was instructed to spend a month identifying one admirable quality in every person encountered.

Some complained the task proved impossible.

Yet by its conclusion they reported discovering generosity among misers, courage among the timid, patience among laborers, honesty among children, and hidden grief beneath anger.

Their interactions transformed accordingly.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Seeing potential encourages its manifestation."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw a thousand lamps extinguished by fierce winds.

Travelers mourned the darkness.

A child approached carrying a single protected flame.

One by one each lamp rekindled from the first without diminishing its brightness.

The Buddha explained:

"Awakening shared does not decrease.

It multiplies."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what of the descendants of the Red World whose ancestors cultivated domination and fear?

Do they equally possess Buddha-Nature?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"They do.

Indeed, much of this scripture has demonstrated precisely that truth.

Their transformation from pride to humility, from secrecy to openness, from manipulation to guardianship, and from fear to bodhicitta reveals not the acquisition of a new essence but the unveiling of one long obscured.

Therefore never define beings solely by past conduct."

The assembly rejoiced profoundly.

The Blessed One recited:

Yesterday's ignorance

Need not imprison

Tomorrow's wisdom.

The lotus

Grows not despite
The mud,

But through it.

The vision shifted once more.

The assembly beheld every world in the cosmos as a vast night sky.

Within each sentient being glowed a faint blue star.

Some shone brightly.

Others flickered beneath heavy clouds.

Yet none had vanished.

As bodhisattvas traveled among them teaching generosity, ethics, meditation, patience, and wisdom, the stars gradually brightened until entire constellations appeared where only darkness had seemed to reign.

The devas sang hymns in praise.

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The crystal lakes of Abhirati reflected not merely those gathered there but every sentient being throughout the ten directions.

Humans.

Nāgas.

Animals.

Devas.

Hungry ghosts.

Wandering ascetics.

Kings.

Beggars.

Children.

Former enemies.

The reflections differed in form but each contained the same clear sapphire radiance beneath temporary obscurations.

Looking upon this miracle, many in the assembly wept with joy.

The Blessed One proclaimed:

"Behold the Universal Buddha-Nature.

Not a possession.

Not an identity.

Not an eternal self.

But the inexhaustible openness through which wisdom, compassion, and awakening become manifest when ignorance ceases.

Knowing this, despise no being.

Abandon no one.

Teach patiently.

Forgive wisely.

Practice diligently.

For every encounter may conceal a future Buddha."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the assembled hosts, Akṣobhya concluded:

"Thus the final barrier of superiority dissolves.

No race is inherently exalted.

No lineage is permanently fallen.

No world is excluded.

No history irrevocably condemns.

The Bodhisattva sees all beings as travelers carrying hidden jewels beneath dusty garments.

His task is not to create treasure but to encourage its discovery."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Within the child,

The sage.

Within the stranger,

The friend.

Within the enemy,

The future companion.

Within the fearful,

Courage.

Within the deluded,

Wisdom.

Within every being,

The unobstructed possibility

Of Buddhahood.

Remember this,

And your compassion

Will know

No boundary.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas attained profound confidence in the universal capacity for awakening.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms across Abhirati.

The nāga kings bowed until tears of gratitude became blue pearls upon the jeweled ground.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati prostrated before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 69

The Great Crossing to Abhirati

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the stainless Buddha-field of Abhirati, where the jeweled earth reflected every form without distortion and the blue lotuses opened continually to the sound of the Dharma.

When the teaching concerning the Universal Buddha-Nature had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, placed his palms together, and bowed before the World-Honored One.

He respectfully asked:

"Blessed One, if all beings possess the potential for awakening and if many generate aspiration toward this Pure Land, how do they finally make the Great Crossing?

How do those dwelling amid the storms of saṃsāra arrive in Abhirati without abandoning their vows to liberate others?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, understand this well.

The Great Crossing is not accomplished by traversing physical distance alone.

The deepest crossing is from delusion to wisdom, from fear to compassion, from grasping to generosity, from confusion to Mirror-Like Awareness.

Those who cultivate these qualities while dedicating merit for the welfare of all beings gradually harmonize with the causes and conditions of Abhirati.

Hear now the teaching of the Great Crossing."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire radiance extending through immeasurable Buddha-fields.

The assembly beheld an immense river wider than oceans.

Its waters symbolized birth and death, gain and loss, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

Upon its banks innumerable beings stood hesitating.

Some feared departure.

Others carried burdens too heavy to move.

Some argued endlessly about the safest route without taking a single step.

The Blessed One declared:

"Many discuss liberation.

Fewer begin walking."

Then he recited:

The map

Cannot cross

The river.

The boat

Cannot row

Itself.

Practice alone

Completes

The journey.

The vision shifted.

Among the descendants of the redeemed Red World there lived an elderly ferryman named Ratnacandra.

His vessel was modest, yet sturdy.

He accepted no payment from those unable to provide it.

Whenever passengers thanked him for carrying them across dangerous waters, he smiled and replied:

"The river allowed the crossing.

I merely held the oar."

After his death, generations remembered not his wealth but his humility.

The Blessed One praised him.

"Thus the bodhisattva becomes a ferryman without claiming ownership of the shore."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, what burdens most prevent beings from crossing?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Three especially:

Attachment to self.

Attachment to resentment.

Attachment to certainty.

Many willingly carry these while abandoning provisions of patience and wisdom.

Therefore their journey becomes unnecessarily difficult."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Lay down

The stone

Of hatred.

There is room instead

For bread

To share.

The vision broadened.

Pilgrims from many lands gathered at the edge of the symbolic river.

One wealthy merchant attempted to load his treasures aboard until the boat nearly sank.

A widow carrying only a small bundle entered safely.

Observing this, the merchant gradually distributed his possessions among the waiting crowd.

As his burden lessened, the vessel floated with ease.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Generosity lightens the voyage."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld a magnificent bridge woven not from wood or stone but from innumerable acts of kindness.

Each honest word formed a plank.

Each reconciliation added a support.

Each patient conversation strengthened a beam.

Each meal shared with the hungry extended the span.

No engineer directed the construction.

Collective virtue itself became architecture.

The Buddha explained:

"The crossing is built continuously through wholesome karma."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

A contemplative physician approached the river accompanied by many former patients.

She insisted they cross first.

The ferryman objected.

"You are elderly and should board before the crowd."

She replied gently:

"I have practiced for this moment all my life."

Watching her conduct, others naturally made room for one another.

No pushing occurred.

The crossing proceeded peacefully.

The Blessed One praised her.

"The bodhisattva's example often accomplishes what commands cannot."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, may one aspire to Abhirati while neglecting beings still suffering?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Such aspiration remains incomplete.

The wish for personal escape alone does not accord fully with the Great Vehicle.

Those who truly long for Abhirati vow to return wherever needed until all beings discover the path.

Paradoxically, this selfless intention harmonizes most deeply with rebirth there."

He then recited:

Seek the farther shore

For everyone's sake,

And the current

Will aid you.

Seek only

Your own safety,

And even shallow water

Seems deep.

The vision deepened.

Throughout future ages monasteries inspired by the redeemed peoples of the Red World adopted a custom before evening meditation.

Practitioners faced the eastern sky and silently dedicated every wholesome action performed that day:

May this merit relieve suffering wherever suffering appears.

No distinction was made between friend and stranger.

Over generations this dedication shaped entire cultures.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Merit shared increases."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw countless blue lotus seeds floating upon the great river.

Whenever a traveler became exhausted, one seed blossomed beneath their feet into a stable platform just large enough for rest.

After recovery the lotus dissolved, allowing another farther behind to benefit.

The Buddha explained:

"Previous acts of compassion sustain future perseverance."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what becomes of fear during the crossing?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"It gradually transforms into vigilance joined with confidence.

The awakened practitioner does not become careless.

Rather, wisdom observes conditions accurately without inventing unnecessary terror.

Thus fear ripens into discernment."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted once more.

A child approached the river carrying only a single blue lotus.

Asked what provision she brought for the journey, she answered:

"My teacher said kindness floats."

She placed the blossom upon the water and stepped gently onto it.

To the amazement of all present, countless other lotuses emerged until an entire path extended across the current.

The Blessed One explained:

"One sincere act often conditions innumerable unseen supports."

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The whole of the Human Realm, together with the descendants of the redeemed Red World and innumerable beings from other domains, appeared upon one bank of the vast river.

On the opposite shore shone Abhirati, not as a distant reward but as the natural flowering of purified intention.

Bridges of generosity, ferries of wisdom, currents of compassion, and winds of meditation carried beings steadily onward.

Yet many bodhisattvas, having reached the jeweled shore, immediately turned their boats around.

Seeing this, Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, why do they return after arriving?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Because they remember their vows.

The greatest joy of Abhirati is not remaining apart from suffering but possessing inexhaustible capacity to assist those still crossing.

Therefore arrival and return become one continuous act of compassion."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly, the Blessed One proclaimed:

"The Great Crossing to Abhirati is completed whenever a being abandons self-centered grasping and entrusts body, speech, and mind to the liberation of all.

Whether rebirth occurs immediately or after countless kalpas, the direction has been established.

Every generous deed becomes an oar.

Every meditation a steady current.

Every truthful word another span of the bridge.

Every moment of bodhicitta already participates in the Pure Land."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Cross bravely.

Cross gently.

Cross together.

Carry not

Only yourself,

But the weary,

The doubtful,

The forgotten.

For the boat

Of boundless compassion

Never sinks

From welcoming

One more traveler,

And the shore

Of Abhirati

Expands

With every vow

To return.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated vast aspirations for rebirth in Abhirati inseparable from the liberation of all sentient beings.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms across the jeweled lakes.

The nāga kings renewed their vows to serve as ferrymen of wisdom rather than guardians of fear.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 70

The Liberation of the Red Nāgas

Thus did the Blessed Akṣobhya continue his sublime discourse before the immeasurable assembly abiding in the inconceivable Buddha-field of Abhirati.

When the teaching concerning the Great Crossing to Abhirati had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, bowed before the World-Honored One, and respectfully inquired:

"Blessed One, throughout this sacred history we have followed the fortunes of the peoples of the Red World—from harmony to delusion, from pride to repentance, from fear to bodhicitta.

Tell us now: How was the Liberation of the Red Nāgas finally accomplished?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, liberation did not occur through conquest, secret power, or the triumph of one lineage over another.

It occurred through the exhaustion of ignorance, the purification of intention, and the unwavering cultivation of wisdom and compassion over immeasurable kalpas.

Hear now of the Liberation of the Red Nāgas."

The assembly became silent with profound anticipation.

Then the Blessed One emitted a boundless sapphire radiance that illuminated the final age of the ancient descendants of Raktaloka.

The assembly beheld communities where the old symbols of domination had long been set aside.

The towers once devoted to surveillance had become observatories for studying the heavens.

Vaults that formerly stored weapons now preserved manuscripts, seeds, and medicines.

Council chambers once echoing with suspicion now welcomed open dialogue.

Children learned meditation before rhetoric.

Engineers studied ethics alongside mathematics.

Leaders regularly exchanged positions with ordinary laborers for periods of service.

The Blessed One declared:

"The deepest revolution transforms habits rather than institutions alone."

Then he recited:

Replace not merely

The banner.

Replace

The intention

That carried it.

The vision shifted.

Among the remaining elders lived an aged contemplative named Sūryaprabha.

He had been born during the final years when memories of fear-based governance still lingered.

As a child he had asked his grandmother:

"Why did our ancestors seek to rule through anxiety?"

She answered simply:

"They mistook trembling for respect."

Those words remained with him throughout life.

In old age he gathered children beneath a blue lotus arbor and taught:

"Never confuse silence born of fear with peace born of understanding."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Thus wisdom passed gently between generations."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, when did they know liberation had truly begun?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"They recognized it when old enemies could no longer remember why hatred had first arisen.

Memories of reconciliation had outlived memories of grievance."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The scar

May remain.

The wound

Need not reopen.

So too

History

May instruct

Without imprisoning.

The vision broadened.

Delegates from every surviving Serpent House convened upon the ancient Plateau of Mirrors.

Each carried one object inherited from former times.

One bore a ceremonial sword.

Another a ledger of taxes.

Another a royal seal.

Another a military trumpet.

Another a jeweled crown.

Another a lock once used upon prison gates.

Another a scroll of secret decrees.

Rather than preserve them as relics of power, they transformed them before the assembled multitude.

The sword became farming tools.

The ledger became paper for copying sutras.

The crown was melted into bells for monasteries.

The trumpet became part of a wind instrument used during festivals.

The prison lock became a hinge for a public library door.

The royal seal impressed clay tablets recording charitable donations.

The secret scrolls were recycled into children's writing materials.

The Blessed One praised these acts.

"Objects liberated from harmful purpose become teachers."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld a colossal serpent coiled tightly around a mountain.

Its scales bore inscriptions:

Pride.

Fear.

Secrecy.

Superiority.

Manipulation.

One by one the inscriptions dissolved.

The serpent slowly uncoiled and descended peacefully into a lake, where its reflection transformed into a blue dragon supporting lotus blossoms upon its back.

The Buddha explained:

"The Red Nāga symbolizes consciousness once constricted by self-clinging and later opened through bodhicitta."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

Communities formerly divided by ancestry adopted a remarkable custom.

Every newborn child received not one family tree but two scrolls.

The first recorded biological lineage.

The second remained blank except for the heading:

Lineage of Compassion.

Throughout life acts of generosity, forgiveness, study, and service were entered there.

By adulthood many considered the second record more precious than the first.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Merit is the noblest ancestry."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, did miraculous signs accompany this liberation?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Some reported unusual dreams.

Others witnessed blue lotuses blooming unexpectedly after rain.

Still others described remarkable coincidences.

Yet the greatest miracle remained ordinary:

People increasingly trusted one another.

Parents raised children without intimidation.

Rulers welcomed criticism.

Neighbors shared abundance.

Prison populations diminished.

Hospitals expanded.

Forests regenerated.

These transformations surpass displays of supernatural power."

The Blessed One recited:

The healed family

Is miracle enough.

The reconciled village

Outshines wonders.

The vision deepened.

An elderly archivist gathered the chronicles of many centuries and wrote their concluding sentence:

> "We sought mastery over others until we discovered mastery over ourselves."

No further commentary seemed necessary.

The manuscript circulated widely.

Many copied only that final line.

The Blessed One praised her brevity.

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw an immense labyrinth whose walls represented ancient habits of domination.

For countless ages travelers wandered within.

Suddenly the walls became transparent.

People realized that exits had always stood nearby but had gone unnoticed because attention remained fixed upon imagined obstacles.

The Buddha explained:

"Delusion often persists through habit more than necessity."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what became of those who never fully accepted these reforms?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"They continued according to their karma.

Some embraced wisdom later.

Some required many further lives.

The bodhisattvas neither despised nor abandoned them.

Compassion remained patient.

No being was declared permanently excluded."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the vision shifted once more.

At the close of one Festival of the Blue Lotus, children performed a play recounting the ancient Age of Fear.

Unlike earlier generations, they struggled to portray convincing tyrants because domination seemed foreign to their daily experience.

Audience members smiled kindly at their awkward performances.

An old monk whispered:

"The teaching has succeeded when cruelty becomes difficult to imagine."

The Blessed One smiled.

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The entirety of Raktaloka appeared beneath a crimson dawn.

From its deserts, valleys, hidden cities, monasteries, gardens, and lakes arose innumerable beings in the form of luminous red nāgas adorned not with armor but with blue lotus garlands.

They gathered before an immense mirror stretching from horizon to horizon.

Looking into it, each expected to see separate forms.

Instead every reflection gradually merged into one vast ocean of sapphire light from which countless compassionate manifestations emerged to benefit all worlds.

No distinction remained between ruler and servant, teacher and student, giver and receiver.

Only the ceaseless activity of awakened compassion appeared.

The Blessed One proclaimed:

"This is the Liberation of the Red Nāgas.

Not annihilation.

Not escape.

But the complete transformation of fear into wisdom, pride into humility, secrecy into transparency, and self-centered ambition into universal bodhicitta.

Thus the ancient karma of the Red World became a treasury of instruction for future kalpas."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly, Akṣobhya declared:

"Whoever hears this account should not search the heavens for hidden races nor fear unseen masters.

Rather, recognize within one's own mind the tendencies symbolized by the Red Nāgas and transform them through ethical conduct, meditation, wisdom, and compassion.

For the liberation described here is available in every moment.

The greatest empire to redeem is self-clinging.

The greatest world to restore is the heart."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

The serpent

Need not die.

It need only

Shed

Its ancient skin.

The desert

Need not vanish.

It need only

Receive rain.

The mind

Need not become

Something else.

It need only

Remember

Its luminous nature,

And the Red Nāga

Will rise

As guardian

Of all beings.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas attained profound realization concerning transformation rather than condemnation.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms throughout Abhirati.

The nāga kings laid aside all symbols of superiority and exchanged blue lotus garlands with one another.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati prostrated before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the entire assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 71

The Union of Worlds

Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed Akṣobhya, the Tathāgata of Imperturbable Suchness, was abiding in the unsurpassed Pure Land of Abhirati, surrounded by immeasurable hosts of bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, and innumerable beings from worlds beyond number.

When the discourse concerning the Liberation of the Red Nāgas had concluded, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati arose from his lotus seat, bowed with folded palms before the World-Honored One, and respectfully inquired:

"Blessed One, if the peoples of the Red World have completed their transformation and innumerable beings have crossed toward wisdom, what relationship then remains between worlds?

Do enlightened realms remain forever separate, or does compassion weave them together?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Sāgaramati, worlds appear divided through karma, perception, and conditions, yet Suchness itself is without boundary.

When ignorance diminishes, separation softens.

When compassion matures, beings no longer ask, 'How may my world prevail?' but rather, 'How may all worlds flourish together?'

Hear now the teaching of the Union of Worlds."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One emitted a sapphire radiance extending beyond calculation.

The assembly beheld innumerable Buddha-fields, celestial realms, human domains, nāga kingdoms beneath vast oceans, mountain hermitages, forests inhabited by sages, and cities filled with ordinary householders.

At first these worlds seemed isolated by immeasurable distances.

Yet as beings practiced generosity and wisdom, luminous bridges of dependent origination gradually appeared between them.

The Blessed One declared:

"Compassion reveals connections already present but long ignored."

Then he recited:

The stars

Appear separate

To the eye.

Yet one sky

Contains them all.

So too

The countless worlds

Abide

Within interdependence.

The vision shifted.

Delegations from the descendants of the redeemed Red World journeyed to neighboring lands carrying neither armies nor demands.

Instead they brought seeds adapted to difficult climates, medical manuscripts, irrigation techniques, poetry, astronomical observations, contemplative practices, and stories illustrating the transformation from fear to bodhicitta.

Receiving communities offered gifts in return: music, philosophy, architecture, medicinal herbs, and local wisdom.

No tribute was required.

Exchange itself became celebration.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Knowledge shared without domination enriches all participants."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, how can worlds unite without losing their distinct traditions?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Observe the forest.

Many trees grow from one earth.

Their leaves differ.

Their fruits differ.

Their fragrances differ.

Uniformity is not unity.

True harmony permits diversity while abandoning hostility."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The orchestra

Needs many instruments.

The garden

Needs many flowers.

The Dharma

Welcomes many skillful means.

The vision broadened.

Throughout future ages, monasteries inspired by Mirror-Like Wisdom established the Festival of Shared Learning.

During this celebration every participant was required to teach one practice from their own tradition and sincerely learn one practice from another.

No debate determined superiority.

Curiosity replaced competition.

Many innovations arose from these encounters.

The Buddha praised this spirit.

"The humble student remains forever teachable."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly beheld seven rivers flowing through different landscapes.

One carried mountain snowmelt.

Another passed fertile plains.

Another wound through deserts.

Another through forests.

At last all entered the same vast ocean without surrendering the histories of their journeys.

The Blessed One explained:

"Distinct causes converge without erasing particular conditions."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

An engineer descended from the ancient Serpent Houses collaborated with a musician from a distant island realm.

At first each dismissed the other's discipline as irrelevant.

Eventually they discovered mathematical harmonies useful for bridge construction and acoustic principles valuable for irrigation channels.

The resulting designs surpassed previous achievements.

Asked how the partnership succeeded, they answered:

"We stopped asking who was correct and began asking what was true."

The Blessed One smiled.

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, may unity itself become attachment?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Indeed.

If beings demand artificial sameness, they generate new conflict.

The Bodhisattva does not erase difference but uproots hostility.

Variety guided by compassion enriches the Dharma."

He then recited:

The lotus

Does not resent

The pine.

The pine

Does not imitate

The lotus.

Both flourish

When rooted

In wholesome soil.

The vision deepened.

Representatives from many worlds convened before a circular table carved from transparent crystal.

No seat occupied the head.

Whenever one participant spoke excessively, the crystal gradually clouded.

Whenever attentive listening returned, clarity reappeared.

Meetings eventually became renowned for thoughtful silence as much as eloquent speech.

The Blessed One declared:

"Listening itself constitutes diplomacy."

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw a vast tapestry woven from threads of countless colors.

A weaver attempted to improve the design by removing every strand except sapphire blue.

Immediately the fabric unraveled.

Another weaver restored crimson, gold, green, white, black, and silver threads while preserving harmonious proportion.

The tapestry became stronger than before.

The Buddha explained:

"Compassion integrates diversity without fragmentation."

Sāgaramati then asked:

"World-Honored One, what of beings who refuse cooperation?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"Treat them with patience.

Offer honest dialogue.

Protect the vulnerable when necessary.

Yet harbor no hatred.

The Bodhisattva distinguishes firm boundaries from hostile intention.

Even disagreement may remain compassionate."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

The Blessed One recited:

Close the gate

Against violence.

Open the heart

Against despair.

Thus wisdom

And compassion

Walk together.

The vision shifted once more.

Generations after the Liberation of the Red Nāgas, children across many lands learned a simple greeting before formal education:

"May your awakening increase mine, and may mine increase yours."

Competition diminished.

Collaborative discovery flourished.

Scientists consulted contemplatives.

Farmers advised rulers.

Artists instructed engineers in perception.

Monastics learned practical trades.

Communities prospered because respect flowed in many directions.

The Blessed One praised this development.

Finally Akṣobhya manifested one last symbolic vision.

The Human Realm, the redeemed Red World, celestial domains, nāga kingdoms, and countless Buddha-fields appeared suspended within limitless space.

Initially each resembled an isolated jewel.

Gradually rays of sapphire light extended between them until every sphere reflected every other.

No central empire governed the whole.

No hierarchy compelled obedience.

Instead an immeasurable Indra-like net of mutual generosity, ethical conduct, wisdom, and compassionate aspiration connected all realms.

Whenever suffering intensified in one region, assistance naturally flowed from many others.

Whenever wisdom blossomed somewhere, its fragrance reached distant worlds.

The Blessed One proclaimed:

"This is the Union of Worlds.

Not political conquest.

Not forced agreement.

Not the erasure of identity.

It is the realization that interdependence has always linked every realm.

The bodhisattva therefore labors not for one nation, one species, or one world alone, but for the liberation of all sentient existence throughout the ten directions."

Turning toward Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly, Akṣobhya declared:

"Remember this well.

The highest civilization is not measured by monuments, technologies, armies, or wealth.

It is measured by how readily beings cooperate across difference for the reduction of suffering.

When compassion becomes the common language, worlds long separated discover they have always shared the same sky."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Build bridges

Before walls.

Ask questions

Before accusations.

Exchange gifts

Before demands.

For the awakened heart

Finds neighbors

In every direction,

And the universe itself

Becomes

One immeasurable

Saṅgha

Gathered beneath

The shade

Of the Bodhi Tree.

When these words had been spoken, innumerable bodhisattvas generated vast aspirations to cultivate harmony among all realms without attachment or domination.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms over the jeweled fields of Abhirati.

The nāga kings exchanged offerings with devas, humans, and wandering sages alike.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and the whole assembly rejoiced in the immeasurable Dharma.

Book IX — The Future Liberation

Chapter 72

The Final Teaching of Akṣobhya

Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed Akṣobhya, the Tathāgata of Imperturbable Suchness, dwelt in the unsurpassed Pure Land of Abhirati, seated upon a great sapphire lotus arising from a lake clear as polished crystal. Around him assembled immeasurable hosts of bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, kinnaras, and countless beings from worlds beyond number.

Among them stood the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati, whose questions had opened the treasury of this teaching concerning the rise, decline, repentance, and liberation of the peoples of the Red World.

When the discourse concerning the Union of Worlds had concluded, Sāgaramati bowed until his forehead touched the jeweled earth and addressed the World-Honored One:

"Blessed One, throughout this vast scripture you have taught of the formation of worlds, the arising of pride, the harvest of

fear, the corruption born of delusion, the return to compassion, the Bodhisattva Vow, the awakening of consciousness, and the liberation of the Red Nāgas.

For the benefit of future generations, summarize the essential meaning of this entire teaching.

What should those living in difficult ages remember above all else?"

The Blessed One remained silent for a long while.

The waters of Abhirati became perfectly still.

The jeweled trees ceased their gentle movement.

Even the celestial birds paused in mid-song.

Then Akṣobhya opened his eyes, and their sapphire radiance illuminated the ten directions.

He spoke:

"Sāgaramati, if all the chapters of this scripture were reduced to a single sentence, it would be this:

Fear contracts the mind. Wisdom opens it. Compassion completes it.

Everything else elaborates this truth."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

Then the Blessed One emitted a final ray of immeasurable light.

Within that radiance appeared every event previously recounted.

The ancient oceans of the Red World.

The rise of the Amphibian peoples.

The discovery of psychic disciplines.

The corruption of domination.

The construction of invisible empires.

The suffering born of manipulation.

The hidden bodhisattvas laboring quietly.

The tears of repentance.

The Great Confession.

The Bodhisattva Vow.

The crossing toward Abhirati.

The liberation of the Red Nāgas.

The union of worlds.

All appeared simultaneously as reflections upon one perfectly still mirror.

No event obscured another.

No hatred remained.

No victory required an enemy.

The Blessed One declared:

"Mirror-Like Wisdom excludes nothing and clings to nothing."

Then he recited:

The mirror

Receives every face.

It praises none.

It condemns none.

Therefore

It reflects truly.

The vision shifted.

The assembly beheld countless future practitioners reading, reciting, copying, translating, debating, preserving, and contemplating this scripture.

Some understood only its stories.

Some appreciated its ethical teachings.

Some interpreted it symbolically.

Some meditated upon its deeper meaning.

The Blessed One smiled.

"According to conditions, beings enter the Dharma through different gates."

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"World-Honored One, should future generations seek hidden rulers behind every event, fearing unseen masters who govern the world?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"They should not.

The greatest hidden ruler is ignorance dwelling within one's own unexamined mind.

The greatest invisible empire is self-grasping.

The fiercest serpent coils around craving.

The darkest prison is hatred.

The highest liberation therefore begins inwardly and expresses itself outwardly through compassionate conduct.

Whoever conquers another may still remain enslaved.

Whoever conquers greed, hatred, and delusion has already entered the path of victory praised by the Buddhas."

The assembly rejoiced.

Then the Blessed One spoke in verse:

Seek not first

An enemy

In distant shadows.

Observe instead

The anger

Rising nearby.

Tame this,

And many battles

Will never begin.

The vision broadened.

A child wandered through a ruined city once associated with ancient conflict.

Finding broken stones, the child stacked them into a bench where weary travelers could rest.

An old monk watching nearby laughed gently.

"Thus monuments to fear become seats for kindness."

The Blessed One praised the child.

"The Bodhisattva transforms karma rather than merely criticizing it."

Then another symbolic vision appeared.

The assembly saw a great library containing every history of every world.

Some volumes described glorious triumphs.

Others chronicled terrible suffering.

At the very center rested a single blank book.

When Sāgaramati opened it, words appeared one by one:

> **The next chapter depends upon present intention.**

The Buddha explained:

"Karma is dynamic.

No destiny is fixed.

Every wholesome action rewrites the future."

The devas rejoiced.

Then the vision shifted again.

The descendants of the redeemed Red Nāgas gathered for the last Festival of the Blue Lotus before dispersing throughout many realms.

No speeches glorified their ancestry.

No songs praised conquest.

Instead they collectively renewed four simple resolutions:

- To replace fear with understanding.
- To replace domination with service.
- To replace secrecy with truthfulness.
- To replace despair with bodhicitta.

The Blessed One smiled.

"Whoever remembers these has understood much of this scripture."

Then Sāgaramati reflected:

"Blessed One, if someone in a future age hears these teachings but doubts their literal history, may they nevertheless receive benefit?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Certainly.

The wise seek liberation rather than argument.

Whether one contemplates these accounts as sacred history, visionary allegory, moral parable, or symbolic cosmology, the essential task remains unchanged:

Abandon greed.

Abandon hatred.

Abandon delusion.

Cultivate generosity.

Cultivate ethical conduct.

Cultivate meditation.

Cultivate wisdom.

Generate bodhicitta for the liberation of all beings.

In this there is no contradiction."

The assembly rejoiced profoundly.

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Argue less

About maps.

Walk more

Upon the road.

Whether drawn

In ink,

Dream,

Or memory,

The true path

Is known

By its fruits.

The vision deepened.

All distinctions between Abhirati and the worlds of ordinary experience gradually became transparent.

The jeweled lakes reflected human villages.

Human rivers reflected the lakes of Abhirati.

Blue lotuses bloomed simultaneously in both.

Sāgaramati understood that Pure Lands are not merely destinations but also ideals continuously manifested through compassionate action.

He bowed deeply.

Then another symbolic vision unfolded.

The assembly saw every sentient being carrying an unseen sapphire jewel wrapped in coarse cloth.

Some guarded it anxiously.

Some forgot its existence.

Some traded the wrapping while ignoring the treasure.

The Buddhas and bodhisattvas never forced the packages open.

They merely reminded beings:

"You carry something precious."

Eventually many untied the cloth themselves.

The jewel within illuminated not only its bearer but countless neighbors.

The Blessed One explained:

"This is Buddha-Nature realized through practice."

Finally Akṣobhya rose from his lotus seat.

The countless beings throughout the ten directions likewise stood.

The Buddha extended his right hand.

From his palm emerged an immeasurable blue lotus whose petals unfolded until they seemed to encompass galaxies beyond counting.

Upon every petal appeared scenes from ordinary life:

A parent comforting a frightened child.

A physician tending the sick.

A teacher encouraging a discouraged student.

A farmer sharing grain after harvest.

A prisoner forgiving an enemy.

A judge admitting error.

A traveler offering water.

A monk meditating beneath a tree.

A laborer repairing a bridge.

A child feeding a hungry animal.

The Blessed One proclaimed:

"Do not imagine Buddhahood to be remote.

Every moment in which wisdom and compassion unite is a petal upon this lotus.

Every fear relinquished nourishes it.

Every truthful word strengthens it.

Every generous act perfumes it.

Every awakening of bodhicitta causes it to bloom throughout the ten directions."

Then Akṣobhya addressed Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly one final time:

"In ages to come, some will seek power.

Some will seek certainty.

Some will seek hidden knowledge.

Some will seek victory over imagined enemies.

Teach them instead to examine their own minds.

Teach them patience.

Teach them dependent origination.

Teach them emptiness inseparable from compassion.

Teach them the Bodhisattva Vow.

Teach them Mirror-Like Wisdom.

For whoever understands these has already entered Abhirati,
even while walking dusty roads beneath ordinary skies."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these final verses:

When fear appears,

Meet it
With mindfulness.

When hatred appears,

Meet it
With patience.

When confusion appears,

Meet it
With inquiry.

When suffering appears,

Meet it
With compassion.

When pride appears,

Bow.

When despair appears,

Plant

One blue lotus.

When certainty hardens,

Listen.

When wisdom dawns,

Share it.

And when the journey ends,

Turn back

Toward the shore,

For countless beings

Still await

A ferryman.

Having spoken thus, the Blessed Akṣobhya entered profound meditative equipoise.

The sapphire lakes reflected the limitless sky without distortion.

Blue lotuses opened across Abhirati and throughout innumerable worlds.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati, together with the devas, nāgas, bodhisattvas, monks, nuns, householders, celestial musicians, and all assembled beings, rejoiced exceedingly in the teaching.

They received it with faith, preserved it in memory, and vowed to recite and practice it throughout future ages for the welfare and liberation of all sentient beings.

Appendix I

The Litany of Akṣobhya

Thus is recited by those who aspire toward the Buddha-field of Abhirati and cultivate the Mirror-Like Wisdom of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya.

May this litany be spoken in times of joy and sorrow, at dawn and dusk, before meditation, before sleep, at the bedside of the sick, and whenever fear arises in the heart.

Homage

Homage to the Blessed Akṣobhya,
the Thus-Gone One,
the Worthy One,
the Perfectly Awakened Buddha,
Lord of the Eastern Realm,
whose wisdom is like a flawless mirror,
whose compassion is without partiality,
whose resolve cannot be shaken,
whose vows endure throughout immeasurable kalpas.

Homage again and again.

Refuge

I take refuge in the Buddha,
who reveals the path beyond fear.

I take refuge in the Dharma,
which reflects all phenomena without distortion.

I take refuge in the Noble Saṅgha,
who walk the path of awakening for the benefit of all beings.

May these Three Jewels protect and guide me until perfect enlightenment is realized.

Praise of Mirror-Like Wisdom

O Imperturbable One,

When anger arises,
may it become clarity.

When fear arises,
may it become courage.

When pride arises,
may it become humility.

When confusion arises,
may it become inquiry.

When suffering arises,
may it become compassion.

As the clear lake reflects mountains without attachment,
may my mind reflect the world without grasping.

As polished sapphire receives every image yet remains unstained,
may wisdom receive every experience without delusion.

Renunciation of Fear

I renounce the cultivation of terror.

I renounce manipulation through deception.

I renounce domination through ignorance.

I renounce delight in another's suffering.

May no being become an instrument of my craving.

May I never mistake intimidation for strength.

May I never mistake silence born of fear for peace.

May courage arise through understanding,
and confidence through truth.

Confession

Knowingly or unknowingly,
through body, speech, or mind,
through greed, hatred, or delusion,
through pride, carelessness, fear, or forgetfulness,
I have caused suffering.

I confess these actions before the mirror of Suchness.

I conceal nothing.

I justify nothing.

I despair of nothing.

May wisdom illuminate my faults,
and may compassionate action transform their consequences.

Generation of Bodhicitta

For the welfare of all beings,
I generate the mind of awakening.

Not for fame.

Not for power.

Not for celestial reward.

Not for personal escape alone.

May every wholesome action
benefit those who suffer.

May every meditation
lessen confusion.

May every word
encourage truth.

May every breath
be dedicated to liberation.

Aspiration for Abhirati

May I cultivate the causes leading toward rebirth in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

May I behold the Blessed Akṣobhya face to face.

May I hear the Dharma continually.

May I perfect generosity,
ethical conduct,
patience,
joyful effort,
meditation,
and transcendent wisdom.

Having reached that Pure Land,
may I never cling to private peace,
but return ceaselessly wherever beings remain in suffering.

Contemplation of Universal Buddha-Nature

All beings possess the potential for awakening.

The frightened possess it.

The proud possess it.

The angry possess it.

The forgotten possess it.

The stranger possesses it.

The enemy possesses it.

The child possesses it.

The elder possesses it.

The wandering animal possesses it.

The unseen being possesses it.

May I never abandon anyone in thought,
word,
or deed.

The Four Remembrances

Remember that all compounded things are impermanent.

Remember that clinging gives rise to suffering.

Remember that all phenomena are empty of independent self.

Remember that nirvāṇa is peace beyond grasping.

Holding these four in memory,
walk gently through the world.

Dedication of Merit

Whatever merit has arisen through this recitation,
whether great or small,

I dedicate it equally to all sentient beings
throughout the ten directions.

May the fearful become fearless.

May the sick recover.

May the grieving find comfort.

May the hungry receive nourishment.

May the lonely discover friendship.

May the violent awaken to compassion.

May the confused realize wisdom.

May the dying pass peacefully.

May those wandering through saṃsāra
encounter the Dharma.

May those cultivating the Bodhisattva Path
never lose heart.

May all beings,
without exception,
realize their innate capacity for awakening
and attain unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment.

Closing Gāthā

Like the blue lotus
opening upon still waters,

May wisdom blossom
within every mind.

Like the eastern dawn
dispelling night's confusion,

May compassion
illumine every world.

Like the mirror
reflecting all without attachment,

May Suchness
be recognized everywhere.

Homage to Akṣobhya,
the Imperturbable Tathāgata.

Homage to the Dharma
of boundless clarity.

Homage to the Saṅgha
who ferries beings across the ocean of becoming.

May all awaken.

May all be liberated.

May all enter the peace of Abhirati.

Svasti.

Appendix II

The Bodhisattva Vows of the Redeemed Nāgas

Thus have I heard.

After the Blessed Akṣobhya had completed the discourse known as **The Array of the Red Nāgas and the Liberation of the Fear Harvesters**, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his seat, bowed with joined palms, and addressed the World-Honored One:

"Blessed One, future generations may wish to follow the example of those beings who transformed fear into wisdom and pride into compassion. May there be a concise rule of life by which they can continually renew their resolve."

The Blessed One replied:

"Excellent, Sāgaramati. These vows were embraced by the Redeemed Nāgas after they renounced domination and generated bodhicitta. They are not chains but liberating commitments. Whoever recites them sincerely and strives to embody them accumulates immeasurable wholesome roots."

Then the Blessed One taught the following vows.

The First Vow: To Harm No Being Deliberately

I vow to protect life wherever possible.

I shall not delight in cruelty.

I shall not seek profit through suffering.

When force becomes unavoidable to prevent greater harm, I shall act with restraint, sorrow, and compassion rather than hatred.

May every creature encounter increasing safety through my conduct.

The Second Vow: To Speak Truthfully

I renounce deception for personal gain.

I renounce manipulation through falsehood.

I renounce the distortion of knowledge to create fear or dependence.

May my speech become clear, timely, beneficial, and rooted in loving-kindness.

The Third Vow: To Replace Fear with Understanding

I shall not intentionally magnify panic.

I shall not govern through intimidation.

I shall not exploit uncertainty for power.

Instead, I shall cultivate wisdom that calms confusion and courage that steadies frightened hearts.

The Fourth Vow: To Regard Every Being as a Potential Buddha

Whether encountering friend or stranger,
the learned or the uneducated,
the wealthy or the poor,
the virtuous or the deeply confused,

I shall remember that all possess the capacity for awakening.

Therefore I will abandon contempt.

The Fifth Vow: To Practice Transparent Conduct

I renounce secret malice.

I renounce hidden exploitation.

I welcome honest examination of my actions.

When corrected with sincerity, I will reflect before defending myself.

The Sixth Vow: To Confess and Amend Faults

Should I fall into greed,
hatred,
delusion,
pride,
or negligence,

I will neither conceal nor despair.

I will confess honestly,
repair what can be repaired,
learn diligently,
and resume the path without delay.

The Seventh Vow: To Transform Power into Service

If entrusted with authority,
I shall wield it for protection rather than domination.

If entrusted with knowledge,
I shall share it generously.

If entrusted with wealth,
I shall steward it compassionately.

If entrusted with influence,
I shall encourage wisdom rather than dependency.

The Eighth Vow: To Cultivate Mirror-Like Wisdom

Before reacting,
I will observe.

Before judging,
I will inquire.

Before condemning,
I will understand conditions.

May my mind resemble a polished mirror,
reflecting phenomena without distortion or attachment.

The Ninth Vow: To Preserve Communities of Practice

I shall support monasteries,
schools,
gardens,
libraries,
hospitals,
and places where beings cultivate wisdom and compassion.

I shall help create conditions in which future generations may awaken more easily than my own.

The Tenth Vow: To Honor Interdependence

I shall remember that my well-being depends upon countless visible and invisible causes.

Therefore I reject arrogance.

The food I eat,
the language I speak,
the knowledge I inherit,
and the body I inhabit
all arise through immeasurable cooperation.

Knowing this,
gratitude shall accompany my actions.

The Eleventh Vow: To Transform Conflict Skillfully

When disagreement arises,
I will seek understanding before victory.

When reconciliation becomes possible,
I will pursue it earnestly.

When firm boundaries become necessary,
I will maintain them without hatred.

The Twelfth Vow: To Protect the Vulnerable

I shall offer assistance to children,
the elderly,
the sick,
the poor,
the displaced,
the forgotten,
and all who suffer neglect.

Protection offered without expectation of reward becomes an offering to the Buddhas.

The Thirteenth Vow: To Cultivate Humility

If praised,
I will remember my teachers.

If criticized,
I will examine myself.

If successful,
I will remain grateful.

If unsuccessful,
I will continue practicing.

I shall seek usefulness rather than prestige.

The Fourteenth Vow: To Dedicate Merit Universally

Whatever wholesome karma arises through generosity,
ethical conduct,
study,
meditation,
or compassionate labor,

I dedicate not to personal gain alone,
but to the awakening of all sentient beings throughout the ten directions.

The Fifteenth Vow: Never to Abandon Bodhicitta

Though discouraged,
I will not surrender compassion.

Though weary,
I will continue serving.

Though uncertain,
I will continue learning.

Though misunderstood,
I will continue practicing.

Though the path extends across immeasurable kalpas,
I will not abandon the aspiration for unsurpassed awakening.

The Collective Recitation

Those gathered repeated together:

> We renounce fear as an instrument of power.
>
> We renounce pride as an obstacle to wisdom.
>
> We renounce secrecy that conceals exploitation.
>
> We renounce despair that denies transformation.
>
> We embrace generosity over grasping.
>
> We embrace patience over anger.
>
> We embrace inquiry over dogmatism.
>
> We embrace compassion over domination.
>
> We embrace Mirror-Like Wisdom over distortion.
>
> We embrace the Bodhisattva Path for the liberation of all beings.

Akṣobhya's Seal of Approval

The Blessed Akṣobhya looked upon the assembly and said:

"Excellent.

These vows are not fulfilled by recitation alone but by continual embodiment.

One who sincerely keeps even a single vow with unwavering integrity plants causes leading toward immeasurable benefit.

One who strives to keep them all becomes like a cool lake reflecting the moon without distortion, offering peace to weary travelers.

Remember always:

The greatest victory is mastery over greed.

The greatest wealth is generosity.

The greatest security is ethical conduct.

The greatest miracle is a heart transformed by compassion.

The greatest kingdom is one governed by wisdom.

The greatest guardian is one who frees rather than controls.

And the greatest offering to the Buddhas is the sincere generation of bodhicitta."

Then the Blessed One concluded with these verses:

Let these vows

Be armor
Without violence.

Let these vows

Be wealth
Without possession.

Let these vows

Be authority
Without domination.

Let these vows

Be mirrors
Without deception.

So shall the descendants

Of every world,

Whether born beneath

Blue skies,

Red deserts,

Or jeweled heavens,

Walk together

Toward the stainless realm

Of Abhirati,

For the welfare,

Peace,

And liberation

Of all sentient beings.

Appendix III

The Cosmology of Abhirati and the Red World

Thus have I heard.

After the Blessed Akṣobhya had expounded the Bodhisattva Vows of the Redeemed Nāgas, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati again rose from his lotus seat, bowed respectfully, and addressed the World-Honored One:

"Blessed One, many future generations will contemplate this scripture. Some will ask how the Pure Land of Abhirati, the Human Realm, and the allegorical Red World described herein are to be understood within Buddhist cosmology.

Out of compassion, explain their relationship according to the Dharma."

The Blessed One replied:

"Excellent, Sāgaramati.

Understand first that the universe perceived by sentient beings is conditioned by karma, dependent origination, and mind.

Many worlds exist throughout immeasurable space and immeasurable time.

Some are coarse.

Some subtle.

Some filled with conflict.

Some adorned by wisdom.

None possess independent existence apart from causes and conditions.

Hear therefore the cosmology taught through this scripture."

I. The Nature of Worlds

The Blessed One said:

"A world is not merely a collection of mountains, oceans, or stars.

A world is the convergence of karma, perception, relationships, memory, and conditions through which beings experience existence.

Thus two beings may dwell in the same location yet inhabit very different worlds according to the qualities of their minds."

Then he spoke in verse:

The fearful

Find prisons.

The grateful

Find teachers.

The compassionate

Find opportunities

To serve.

The place changes

With the heart.

II. The Human Realm

The Human Realm occupies a precious middle condition.

Its pleasures are sufficient to sustain life without inevitably producing complacency.

Its sufferings are severe enough to inspire inquiry without rendering practice impossible.

Therefore Buddhas repeatedly praise human birth as a favorable opportunity for cultivating awakening.

The Blessed One declared:

"Do not despise the Human Realm because suffering appears within it.

It is often through suffering that wisdom first arises."

III. The Red World

The Red World described in this scripture is presented as a symbolic realm within the vast web of dependent origination.

Its crimson deserts, ancient oceans, subterranean cities, and redeemed nāga civilizations illustrate how entire societies may become shaped by collective karma.

Its history demonstrates that even cultures captivated by domination and fear remain capable of transformation through bodhicitta.

Therefore the Red World should not be regarded primarily as an object of speculation but as a mirror for contemplation.

The Blessed One said:

"Search first for the Red World within the tendencies of your own mind."

IV. Abhirati

Abhirati, the Pure Land established through the vows of Akṣobhya Tathāgata, is a Buddha-field purified by immeasurable merit and wisdom.

There the Dharma is continually accessible.

Conditions favor meditation.

Wise companions abound.

Confusion rarely overwhelms practitioners.

Yet Abhirati exists not merely as reward but as an environment supporting further cultivation for the benefit of all beings.

Those reborn there continue the Bodhisattva Path rather than abandoning it.

The Blessed One declared:

"The highest joy of Abhirati is the opportunity to assist countless worlds."

V. The Direction East

Many traditions describe Abhirati as lying toward the East.

The Blessed One explained:

"East signifies the arising of illumination.

Just as dawn dispels darkness gradually rather than violently, so wisdom unfolds through patient practice.

Whoever turns toward ethical conduct, meditation, and compassion already faces the true East."

VI. The Mirror Principle

Throughout Abhirati stand innumerable lakes and mirrors.

These symbolize unobstructed awareness.

Mirror-Like Wisdom neither clings nor rejects.

It reflects phenomena exactly as they arise without distortion through greed, hatred, or delusion.

Practitioners should therefore cultivate minds resembling still water.

When disturbed, wait patiently until clarity returns.

VII. The Blue Lotus

The blue lotus appearing throughout this scripture symbolizes awakening emerging amid difficult conditions.

Its roots extend through mud.

Its blossom opens above the water unstained.

Likewise practitioners cultivate wisdom while living amid saṃsāra without becoming bound by it.

Whenever blue lotuses appear in these teachings, remember the possibility of liberation arising within ordinary circumstances.

VIII. The Red Nāgas

The Red Nāgas symbolize intelligent beings whose gifts became obscured by attachment to superiority, fear, and control.

Their eventual redemption demonstrates the universality of Buddha-Nature.

The Blessed One warned:

"Do not waste time searching mountains or planets for hidden races while ignoring greed and hatred within yourself.

Transform the inner serpent, and the outer world will also change."

IX. The Seven Houses

The Seven Houses described in the sacred history represent recurring patterns present within individuals and societies alike:

- The House of Pride.
- The House of Fear.
- The House of Secrecy.
- The House of Control.
- The House of Ambition.
- The House of Memory.
- The House of Transformation.

Every practitioner contains traces of each.

Through mindfulness, the first six become purified and ultimately support the seventh.

X. The Invisible Empire

The Invisible Empire should be understood as the network of delusive habits arising through collective craving and ignorance.

Whenever institutions reward manipulation over truth, fear over understanding, or domination over service, the Invisible Empire manifests.

Whenever transparency, compassion, accountability, and wisdom prevail, its influence weakens.

Its strongest fortress lies within self-centered grasping.

Its weakest foundation lies beneath mindful observation.

XI. The Great Crossing

The river crossed by pilgrims symbolizes saṃsāra itself.

The boats represent ethical conduct.

The oars represent diligence.

The current represents dependent origination.

The destination represents awakening.

Yet the greatest ferryman is bodhicitta, for compassion carries beings farther than fear ever could.

XII. The Sapphire Jewel

The sapphire jewel recurring throughout these teachings represents luminous awareness free from distortion.

It should not be mistaken for a permanent soul or metaphysical substance.

Rather, it symbolizes the mind's capacity to realize emptiness while functioning with perfect compassion.

The Blessed One said:

"As sapphire appears blue because of conditions, so too wisdom appears through causes and conditions."

XIII. The Crimson Desert

The desert signifies existential isolation produced by craving.

Its dryness reflects the exhaustion of minds consumed by attachment.

The springs hidden beneath its sands represent wholesome roots never entirely extinguished.

Meditation uncovers these springs.

Compassion allows them to flow.

XIV. The Crystal Cities

The buried crystal cities symbolize forgotten virtues obscured by history, pride, or negligence.

Excavating them does not require archaeology but recollection.

Whenever beings rediscover honesty, generosity, gratitude, or patience long neglected, another crystal city rises from beneath the sands.

XV. The Final Interpretation

Then Sāgaramati bowed and asked:

"Blessed One, should future readers insist upon only one interpretation of these teachings?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"No.

Some will contemplate them devotionally.

Some philosophically.

Some historically.

Some symbolically.

Some as meditation manuals.

Some as moral allegories.

If their contemplation diminishes greed, hatred, and delusion while increasing wisdom and compassion, then they approach the intention of this sutra.

Attachment even to correct interpretation becomes another veil."

Closing Gāthā

Then the Blessed One summarized:

Worlds arise

Through conditions.

Pure Lands arise

Through vows.

Fear arises

Through ignorance.

Wisdom arises

Through inquiry.

Compassion arises

Through recognizing

No being

Stands alone.

Know therefore

That the universe

Is immeasurably vast,

Yet the path

Begins

Exactly where

Your next intention

Takes root.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rejoiced greatly, together with the devas, nāgas, monks, nuns, and all assembled beings.

They bowed before Akṣobhya Tathāgata and resolved to contemplate these teachings not merely as descriptions of distant realms, but as instructions for transforming the worlds continually arising within their own minds.

Appendix IV

The Seven Clans of the Red World

Thus have I heard.

After the Blessed Akṣobhya had expounded the Cosmology of Abhirati and the Red World, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his seat, joined his palms, and respectfully addressed the World-Honored One:

"Blessed One, throughout this sacred history reference has been made to the Seven Clans that shaped the destiny of the Red World. For the benefit of future practitioners, explain their true significance, that they may not mistake genealogy for destiny or symbolism for inherent nature."

The Blessed One replied:

"Excellent, Sāgaramati.

The Seven Clans should not be understood merely as biological lineages or political factions. They represent recurring dispositions of mind and society. Though illustrated through the history of the Red World, their qualities may arise wherever sentient beings dwell.

No being is permanently bound to any clan.

Through karma, mindfulness, and the cultivation of bodhicitta, one may transform any tendency into a cause for awakening."

Then the Blessed One explained each clan in turn.

I. The Clan of the Sapphire Spring

The oldest chronicles speak of those who settled beside hidden waters beneath the crimson sky.

They became renowned for contemplation, patience, and careful observation.

Rather than seeking rapid conquest, they studied seasonal rhythms, cultivated irrigation, and preserved records for future generations.

Their greatest strength was foresight.

Their greatest temptation was excessive caution.

The Blessed One said:

"Patience without courage becomes stagnation."

Therefore members of this disposition should cultivate decisive compassion.

Its emblem is the **Blue Lotus upon Still Water**.

II. The Clan of the Crimson Dunes

Those dwelling among shifting deserts learned resilience through hardship.

They prized endurance, discipline, and personal responsibility.

They crossed great distances carrying little beyond necessity.

Their greatest strength was perseverance.

Their greatest temptation was pride in self-sufficiency.

The Blessed One declared:

"Even the strongest traveler depends upon countless unseen causes."

Its emblem is the **Wind-Shaped Sand Ripple**.

III. The Clan of the Crystal Caverns

Beneath ancient stone lay vast chambers filled with luminous minerals.

Their inhabitants excelled in craftsmanship, architecture, mathematics, and engineering.

They delighted in creating lasting structures.

Their greatest strength was precision.

Their greatest temptation was valuing perfection above compassion.

The Blessed One smiled:

"A flawless bridge unused by travelers benefits no one."

Its emblem is the **Hexagonal Crystal**.

IV. The Clan of the Emerald Marsh

Living near subterranean lakes and wetlands, this clan developed exceptional skills in healing, herbal knowledge, and the care of living systems.

Their physicians served friend and stranger alike.

Their greatest strength was empathy.

Their greatest temptation was exhaustion through neglect of their own well-being.

The Blessed One taught:

"Those who refill others' cups should also drink."

Its emblem is the **Reed Encircling Water**.

V. The Clan of the Golden Horizon

These were explorers, astronomers, navigators, and seekers.

They crossed deserts and observed the heavens with equal fascination.

Their curiosity expanded knowledge across many lands.

Their greatest strength was inquiry.

Their greatest temptation was endless wandering without commitment.

The Blessed One declared:

"The map reaches fulfillment only when someone arrives."

Its emblem is the **Seven-Pointed Star Above the Horizon**.

VI. The Clan of the Obsidian Mountain

Dwelling among volcanic heights and black stone ridges, these people became guardians, builders of fortifications, and keepers of difficult frontiers.

They valued loyalty and steadfastness.

Their greatest strength was reliability.

Their greatest temptation was rigidity.

The Blessed One observed:

"The mountain that never yields eventually fractures."

Its emblem is the **Black Peak Crowned with Snow**.

VII. The Clan of the Mirror Lake

The last and most mysterious of the Seven became known for philosophy, meditation, diplomacy, and conflict resolution.

Rather than asking who should prevail, they asked what conditions produced disagreement.

Their greatest strength was discernment.

Their greatest temptation was excessive detachment.

The Blessed One declared:

"Wisdom without compassionate action remains incomplete."

Its emblem is the **Circular Mirror Reflecting the Moon**.

The Blending of the Clans

Then Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, were these clans forever distinct?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"No.

Intermarriage, migration, friendship, trade, and shared practice gradually blended them until their boundaries became difficult to distinguish.

This was beneficial.

For no single disposition contains every virtue.

Communities flourish through complementary strengths."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

The healer

Needs the builder.

The builder

Needs the philosopher.

The philosopher

Needs the farmer.

The farmer

Needs the explorer.

Thus all

Support all.

The Eighth Clan Never Named

Sāgaramati bowed again and asked:

"Blessed One, ancient stories occasionally whisper of an Eighth Clan hidden from ordinary record. Is there truth in this?"

The Blessed One smiled but did not answer immediately.

After a long silence he said:

"The Eighth Clan has no bloodline.

It possesses no territory.

Its members appear within every people.

They are recognized not by ancestry but by bodhicitta.

Wherever someone chooses compassion over domination, generosity over greed, inquiry over dogmatism, and wisdom over fear, there the Eighth Clan quietly appears."

The assembly rejoiced greatly.

The devas scattered sapphire blossoms throughout the air.

The Transformation of the Seven

As ages passed and the Dharma spread throughout the Red World, each clan gradually transformed its former weaknesses.

The cautious learned courage.

The proud learned humility.

The perfectionists learned mercy.

The healers learned balance.

The wanderers learned commitment.

The guardians learned flexibility.

The philosophers learned compassionate engagement.

Thus diversity matured into harmony.

The Blessed One proclaimed:

"Virtues perfected through cooperation surpass isolated excellence."

The Inner Meaning

Finally Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, how should future practitioners apply these teachings?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Examine your own mind.

You may discover the patience of the Sapphire Spring.

The endurance of the Crimson Dunes.

The precision of the Crystal Caverns.

The compassion of the Emerald Marsh.

The curiosity of the Golden Horizon.

The steadfastness of the Obsidian Mountain.

The discernment of the Mirror Lake.

Cultivate each while abandoning attachment to identity.

In doing so, you become heir to every clan without excluding anyone."

Closing Gāthā

Then the Blessed One summarized in verse:

Seven rivers

Flow separately.

One ocean

Receives them.

Seven virtues

Grow differently.

One bodhicitta

Perfects them.

Claim not,

"I alone
Belong."

Say instead,

"May every wholesome quality

Find a home

Within this mind."

Thus the Seven Clans
Become one family,

And the one family

Embraces

All worlds.

When these words had been spoken, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati and the entire assembly rejoiced exceedingly.

The nāga kings removed the insignia of clan rivalry and exchanged blue lotus garlands as signs of fellowship.

The devas sang hymns celebrating unity without uniformity.

The Blessed Akṣobhya remained serene upon his sapphire lotus, and all present resolved to cultivate the virtues of every clan while transcending attachment to all divisions.

Appendix V

The Meditation on Mirror-Like Wisdom

Thus have I heard.

After the Blessed Akṣobhya had expounded the Seven Clans of the Red World, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose, bowed with joined palms, and respectfully inquired:

"World-Honored One, many beings hear the Dharma with faith yet remain troubled by anger, fear, confusion, and attachment. Out of compassion, teach a meditation by which ordinary practitioners may gradually cultivate the Mirror-Like Wisdom praised throughout this scripture."

The Blessed One replied:

"Excellent, Sāgaramati.

Mirror-Like Wisdom is not acquired from outside. It is revealed when agitation settles and grasping loosens. Practice patiently, neither forcing the mind nor abandoning diligence.

I shall now teach a contemplation suitable for monastics and householders alike."

The assembly became silent and attentive.

I. Preparing the Place

The Blessed One said:

"Choose a place that encourages steadiness.

It may be a monastery hall, a quiet room, a forest clearing, a garden, or the bank of a still lake.

Clean the place respectfully.

If desired, place before you a blue flower, a bowl of clear water, or an image of Akṣobhya Tathāgata—not because awakening resides in these objects, but because symbols assist recollection."

Then he recited:

Sweep the floor.

Lightly arrange the seat.

Order outside

Encourages order within.

II. Preparing the Body

Sit upright without rigidity.

Rest the hands comfortably.

Allow the shoulders to soften.

Let the jaw relax.

Breathe naturally.

The Blessed One declared:

"Do not seek unusual sensations.

An ordinary breath observed carefully surpasses extraordinary experiences pursued through craving."

III. Taking Refuge

Silently recollect:

> I take refuge in the Buddha,
> the fully awakened guide.
>
> I take refuge in the Dharma,
> the path of liberation.

I take refuge in the Noble Saṅgha,
companions upon the way.

Pause and allow gratitude to arise.

IV. Establishing the Breath

Attend gently to inhalation and exhalation.

Do not manipulate breathing.

Simply know:

"This is inhaling."

"This is exhaling."

When distraction occurs, return kindly.

The Blessed One instructed:

"The purpose is not to eliminate thought but to recognize wandering without becoming its servant."

Then he spoke in verse:

Return again.

Return gently.

The path

Is walked

One breath

At a time.

V. Contemplating the Mirror

When the mind has grown somewhat steady, imagine before you a flawless sapphire mirror.

Notice that it reflects every form:

Beautiful and unpleasant.

Pleasant and painful.

Friend and stranger.

Gain and loss.

Yet it grasps none and rejects none.

The Blessed One said:

"Train your awareness likewise."

VI. Meeting Emotions

Should anger arise, observe:

"Anger is present."

Should fear arise:

"Fear is present."

Should joy arise:

"Joy is present."

Do not immediately identify with these experiences.

Do not suppress them.

Regard them as clouds crossing an open sky.

The Blessed One declared:

"The mirror reflects fire without burning."

VII. Investigating Dependent Origination

Ask gently:

From what conditions has this thought arisen?

What memory supports it?

What expectation strengthens it?

What fear sustains it?

Observe without blame.

Many disturbances diminish once their conditions become visible.

VIII. Cultivating Compassion

Having observed your own experience, expand awareness toward others.

Reflect:

"Just as I seek happiness and fear suffering, so do all beings."

Include family.

Include strangers.

Include rivals.

Include those difficult to understand.

The Blessed One taught:

"The mirror excludes no face."

IX. Releasing Self-Grasping

Observe sensations, perceptions, intentions, memories, and emotions arising and passing.

Search carefully for an independent, permanent controller.

Notice changing processes instead.

Do not become frightened.

The Blessed One explained:

"The absence of a fixed self permits limitless compassion."

Then he recited:

The river flows.

The flame dances.

The song continues.

Yet nowhere

Is permanence found.

X. The Blue Lotus Visualization

Imagine a blue lotus unfolding at the center of your heart.

Each petal bears one perfection:

Generosity.

Ethical conduct.

Patience.

Joyful effort.

Meditation.

Wisdom.

As breathing continues, the lotus gradually opens.

With every exhalation its fragrance spreads through the ten directions.

It asks nothing in return.

XI. Remembering Impermanence

Contemplate:

This body changes.

Feelings change.

Relationships change.

Societies change.

Worlds change.

Stars change.

Even memories fade.

Therefore cling gently.

The Blessed One observed:

"Impermanence is not punishment but possibility."

XII. The Great Reflection

Now ask silently:

What today most increased suffering?

What today most relieved suffering?

Resolve to strengthen the latter tomorrow.

This reflection transforms meditation into conduct.

XIII. Dedicating Merit

Conclude by thinking:

> Whatever clarity has arisen,
> whatever patience has grown,

whatever compassion has appeared,
I dedicate it to all sentient beings.

May the frightened become fearless.
May the grieving find comfort.
May the angry discover peace.
May the confused encounter wisdom.
May all awaken according to causes and conditions.

XIV. Daily Practice

Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, how long should this meditation continue?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"Whether for many hours or a single mindful breath, practice sincerely.

Consistency surpasses intensity.

The mirror polished a little each day eventually reflects perfectly."

XV. Meditation in Ordinary Activity

The Blessed One continued:

"When walking, know walking.

When eating, know eating.

When speaking, know speaking.

When listening, truly listen.

When washing bowls, wash bowls.

When comforting the grieving, comfort fully.

Do not confine Mirror-Like Wisdom to seated contemplation."

The assembly rejoiced.

XVI. Obstacles

Sāgaramati asked:

"What if boredom arises?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Observe boredom.

"What if excitement arises?"

"Observe excitement."

"What if sleepiness arises?"

"Observe sleepiness."

"What if pride arises because meditation seems successful?"

"Observe pride."

Thus every obstacle becomes another object reflected by the mirror.

XVII. Signs of Progress

The Blessed One warned:

"Do not measure advancement through visions or supernatural experiences.

Instead examine:

Has patience increased?

Has honesty deepened?

Has fear lessened?

Has generosity expanded?

Do difficult people evoke greater understanding?

If so, Mirror-Like Wisdom matures."

XVIII. The Story of the Polisher

To illustrate, the Blessed One told of an old artisan who polished mirrors for many decades.

An impatient apprentice asked:

"When will this mirror become perfect?"

The elder smiled.

"It became useful long before it became flawless."

Likewise, practitioners benefit others even while continuing their own cultivation.

XIX. The Four Daily Aspirations

The Blessed One advised repeating each morning:

> May I see clearly.
>
> May I speak truthfully.
>
> May I act compassionately.
>
> May I dedicate every merit universally.

Those who remember these four aspirations repeatedly orient themselves toward awakening.

XX. Final Instruction

At last Akṣobhya said:

"Do not seek to become a mirror admired by others.

Seek to become a mirror that allows beings to recognize their own capacity for awakening.

If your presence encourages honesty, patience, courage, and kindness, then this meditation has borne fruit."

Closing Gāthā

Then the Blessed One summarized:

Polish not

Only bronze,

But intention.

Still not

Only water,

But thought.

Open not

Only eyes,

But compassion.

Reflect the world

Without hatred.

Reflect yourself

Without pride.

Reflect all beings

Without exclusion.

Then the sapphire mirror

Needs no frame,

For wherever wisdom

Meets loving-kindness,

There

Mirror-Like Awareness

Already shines.

When these words had been spoken, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly entered a profound meditative silence.

Many experienced great tranquility, not through escape from the world, but through seeing the world with increasing clarity and compassion.

The devas scattered sapphire blossoms across the lakes of Abhirati, and the nāga kings sat motionless in contemplation until the moon rose over the eastern horizon.

Appendix VI

The Sūtra of Fear’s Emptiness

Thus have I heard.

After the Blessed Akṣobhya had taught the Meditation on Mirror-Like Wisdom, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his seat, bowed respectfully, and addressed the World-Honored One:

"Blessed One, throughout this scripture fear has been described as a cause of suffering, a tool of domination, and an obscuration of wisdom. Yet many beings remain overwhelmed by anxiety and dread.

Teach us, O Compassionate One, the true nature of fear and the means by which it may be understood without suppression and transcended without denial."

The Blessed One replied:

"Excellent, Sāgaramati.

Fear is among the oldest companions of sentient beings wandering through saṃsāra. It has preserved life in times of danger, yet when joined with ignorance it multiplies suffering beyond necessity.

Hear now the teaching on Fear’s Emptiness."

The entire assembly grew still.

I. The Mirage in the Desert

The Blessed One said:

"Imagine a traveler crossing the crimson desert at midday.

From afar he sees what appears to be a great lake.

He hastens toward it, thirst increasing with every step.

Upon arrival he discovers shimmering air alone.

The appearance existed.

Its interpretation was mistaken.

So too many fears arise."

Then he spoke in verse:

The eye sees.

The mind concludes.

Wisdom pauses

Between the two.

II. Fear and Wisdom

Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, should fear always be rejected?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"No.

When a cliff stands before you, step carefully.

When illness appears, seek treatment.

When injustice harms the vulnerable, respond courageously.

This is prudent discernment.

But to imagine ten thousand cliffs where none exist, or to remain forever trembling after reaching safe ground, is unnecessary suffering."

The Blessed One declared:

"Discernment protects.

Delusion exaggerates."

III. The Empty Throne

The assembly then beheld a symbolic vision.

Within an immense palace stood a magnificent throne said to be occupied by the Lord of Fear.

Countless messengers bowed before it.

Armies assembled around it.

People whispered of its power.

At last a child approached and looked behind the throne.

No sovereign sat there.

The crowds had frightened one another through assumption alone.

The Blessed One explained:

"So it is with many imagined tyrannies of the mind."

IV. The Echo in the Cavern

A traveler entered a mountain cave and shouted.

The cave returned his voice magnified.

Believing another hostile presence hidden within, he fled in terror.

Years later a contemplative entered the same cavern, bowed respectfully, and whispered:

"Peace."

The cavern answered:

"Peace."

The Blessed One smiled.

"The world often echoes the qualities we project into it."

V. The Rope and the Serpent

At dusk a novice mistook a coiled rope for a venomous serpent.

His heart raced.

Sweat formed upon his brow.

Only after bringing a lantern did he laugh.

The rope had never changed.

Knowledge alone dissolved panic.

The Blessed One declared:

"Thus investigation is medicine."

VI. The Fear Merchant

There once lived a merchant who sold bells claiming they protected against invisible monsters.

The more frightened people became, the more bells they purchased.

A wandering nun quietly asked villagers:

"Have you ever seen the creatures these bells repel?"

None had.

She encouraged mindfulness instead.

Gradually confidence returned, and the merchant learned an honest trade repairing tools.

The Blessed One observed:

"Fear often profits from unexamined imagination."

VII. The Bowl of Ink

A monk poured a drop of black ink into a vast lake.

The water remained clear.

Another poured the same drop into a tiny cup.

It became undrinkable.

Likewise, a spacious mind absorbs disturbance without losing balance, while a constricted mind becomes overwhelmed by minor anxieties.

Therefore cultivate breadth through meditation and compassion.

VIII. The Four Questions

The Blessed One instructed practitioners to ask, whenever fear arises:

1. What exactly am I afraid of?
2. What evidence supports this fear?
3. What conditions might change it?
4. What compassionate action can I take now?

If no immediate action exists, practice patience.

If action is possible, act wisely.

If uncertainty remains, continue observing without panic.

IX. The Arrow of Imagination

A hunter accidentally struck his own foot with an arrow.

The wound caused pain.

He then imagined losing the leg.

Then imagined losing the ability to work.

Then imagined poverty.

Then imagined abandonment.

Then imagined dying alone.

His suffering multiplied far beyond the original injury.

The physician removed the arrow and said:

"Treat first what is real."

The Blessed One smiled.

X. The Wind Through Bamboo

Fearful thoughts passed through the mind of an old hermit like wind through bamboo.

The bamboo bent but did not break.

Afterward stillness returned naturally.

The hermit explained:

"I stopped arguing with every breeze."

XI. The Fear of Death

Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, what of death, which many fear above all else?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"The contemplation of impermanence properly understood encourages diligence rather than despair.

Birth and death characterize conditioned existence.

Knowing this, the wise cultivate wholesome causes now instead of postponing virtue."

Then he recited:

Knowing sunset comes,

Plant trees.

Knowing life ends,

Practice kindness.

XII. Fear for Others

The Blessed One continued:

"Concern for loved ones often appears as fear.

Transform it into care.

Instead of endless worry, offer assistance.

Instead of catastrophic imagination, offer presence.

Compassion acts where anxiety merely circles."

XIII. The Mirror of Fear

The assembly saw a sapphire mirror.

Whenever someone approached consumed by panic,
monstrous reflections appeared.

When the same person paused, breathed, and looked carefully,
the mirror reflected only their own face.

The Buddha explained:

"Fear frequently enlarges itself through haste."

XIV. The Empty Net

Fishermen cast an enormous net into a lake believing monstrous creatures lurked beneath.

Drawing it ashore after hours of labor, they discovered only water plants and ordinary fish.

An elderly woman laughed gently.

"Much exhaustion comes from chasing fantasies."

The assembly joined her laughter.

XV. The Red Storm

A violent crimson dust storm swept across the desert.

Travelers panicked and fled in random directions.

One contemplative simply covered his face, sheltered behind a rock, and waited.

When the wind subsided, he calmly resumed walking.

The Blessed One declared:

"Not every storm requires immediate movement."

XVI. The Compassionate Warrior

A guardian once confessed:

"I fear I am cowardly because danger frightens me."

The Buddha answered:

"Courage is not the absence of fear but the decision that wisdom and compassion deserve greater loyalty than fear."

The guardian bowed deeply.

XVII. The Empty Nature of Fear

Finally Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, in what sense is fear empty?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"Fear arises through causes and conditions.

It changes.

It lacks independent, permanent essence.

It is observed by awareness and therefore cannot itself be the observer.

Seeing this directly, attachment loosens.

Fear may still arise, yet it no longer governs."

The Blessed One then spoke in verse:

Fear appears.

Fear changes.

Fear departs.

Know this,

And you need not

Become fear.

XVIII. The Blue Lotus in the Storm

The assembly beheld blue lotuses blooming amid heavy rain.

The petals collected droplets without clinging.

When the clouds passed, the flowers remained open toward the sun.

The Blessed One said:

"Such is the mind trained in the Dharma.

It experiences conditions fully without becoming imprisoned by them."

XIX. The Great Reversal

Then Akṣobhya proclaimed:

"The opposite of fear is not recklessness.

Nor denial.

Nor pride.

Its true opposite is awakened compassion.

For when concern expands beyond self-centered attachment to include all beings, the prison of isolated anxiety dissolves.

The Bodhisattva still perceives danger but responds with clarity rather than panic."

XX. Closing Gāthā

The Blessed One concluded:

See clearly.

Pause gently.

Question wisely.

Act compassionately.

Fear is a visitor,

Not a sovereign.

It knocks.

You may answer,

Learn,

And let it pass.

The mirror remains.

The lotus blooms.

The eastern sky brightens.

And the path to Abhirati

Continues

Step by mindful step,

Across the empty deserts

Of imagined despair,

Into the boundless field

Of fearless wisdom.

When these words had been spoken, many in the assembly found longstanding anxieties greatly diminished.

The devas scattered sapphire blossoms through the air.

The nāga kings laid aside ceremonial armor and sat peacefully beside the crystal lakes.

The Bodhisattva Sāgaramati bowed before the Blessed Akṣobhya, and the entire gathering rejoiced in the profound teaching.

Appendix VII

The Dedication of Universal Merit

Thus have I heard.

After the Blessed Akṣobhya had expounded the Sūtra of Fear’s Emptiness, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati rose from his seat, joined his palms, and respectfully asked:

"World-Honored One, when practitioners complete the recitation of this scripture or perform wholesome deeds, by what contemplation should they dedicate the resulting merit so that it accords with the Bodhisattva Path and benefits immeasurable beings?"

The Blessed One replied:

"Excellent, Sāgaramati.

Merit grasped as personal possession diminishes through attachment.

Merit freely dedicated becomes like a lamp lighting countless other lamps without exhausting its own flame.

Hear now the Dedication of Universal Merit."

The assembly rejoiced and listened attentively.

I. The Boundless Treasury

The Blessed One declared:

"Imagine a treasury containing inexhaustible jewels.

The more generously they are distributed, the more brilliantly they appear.

So too with wholesome karma dedicated through bodhicitta.

One who hoards merit remains spiritually poor.

One who shares it becomes immeasurably wealthy."

Then he spoke in verse:

The closed hand

Counts coins.

The open hand

Plants forests.

Choose well.

II. Dedication After Every Virtuous Act

The Blessed One taught:

Whenever generosity is practiced,

Whenever truth is spoken,

Whenever anger is restrained,

Whenever patience prevails,

Whenever meditation is cultivated,

Whenever wisdom arises,

Pause briefly and reflect:

> "May whatever goodness has arisen here
> become a cause of awakening and relief from
> suffering for all sentient beings."

Even a single sincere thought transforms ordinary action into vast aspiration.

III. The Four Directions

Practitioners should extend loving dedication toward every direction.

Facing the East:

May wisdom dawn for all beings.

Facing the South:

May compassion flourish in every land.

Facing the West:

May those burdened by sorrow discover peace.

Facing the North:

May courage arise wherever fear prevails.

Then, turning upward and downward, contemplate:

May all visible and invisible realms benefit equally.

IV. Those Closest

First dedicate merit to parents, guardians, teachers, friends, companions, and benefactors.

Remember gratitude.

Reflect that countless conditions made one's present life possible.

The Blessed One declared:

"Gratitude nourishes humility."

V. Those Forgotten

Next dedicate merit to those whose names are unknown:

The lonely.

The imprisoned.

The refugee.

The orphan.

The grieving.

The exhausted laborer.

The unseen caregiver.

The one who believes no one remembers.

May they encounter kindness unexpectedly.

VI. Those Difficult to Love

Sāgaramati asked:

"Blessed One, should merit also be dedicated toward those who have caused harm?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"Indeed.

Not because harmful actions should be approved, but because liberation from ignorance prevents future suffering.

To wish wisdom for another is itself an act of compassion."

Then he recited:

May the angry

Find patience.

May the cruel

Discover remorse.

May the fearful

Become protectors.

May the deluded

Awaken.

VII. The Animal Realms

The Blessed One continued:

"Extend dedication also toward creatures of field and forest, mountain and ocean, sky and river.

Though they may not comprehend your words, wholesome intention conditions wholesome karma.

Treat them with gentleness whenever possible."

VIII. The Hungry and the Sick

Whenever preparing food, silently think:

> May all who hunger be nourished.

Whenever taking medicine:

> May all who suffer illness encounter healing.

Whenever drinking water:

> May wisdom refresh every weary mind.

Thus ordinary acts become continual offerings.

IX. The Ancestors and Descendants

Dedicate merit toward those who came before and those yet unborn.

Reflect:

> May the mistakes of the past become wisdom for the future.
>
> May future generations inherit greater compassion than our own.

The Blessed One smiled.

"The Bodhisattva thinks across immeasurable time."

X. The Worlds Beyond Sight

Then Akṣobhya said:

"Many beings dwell beyond ordinary perception.

Whether near or far, fortunate or distressed, known or unknown, dedicate merit universally without discrimination.

The awakened heart draws no narrow boundary."

XI. The Offering of Knowledge

If one has learned a useful skill, share it.

If one has gained understanding, teach humbly.

If one has received kindness, continue its movement.

Knowledge concealed through selfishness withers.

Knowledge offered generously multiplies.

XII. The River of Merit

The assembly beheld a symbolic vision.

Countless streams flowed from mountains across many lands.

One traveler attempted to dam every stream for private use.

The water stagnated.

Another allowed the rivers to continue nourishing valleys and villages.

The waters remained fresh.

The Blessed One explained:

"So too merit remains living through circulation."

XIII. The Invisible Benefactor

In a future age a woman quietly repaired worn sandals left outside a monastery each night.

No one discovered her identity.

Pilgrims walked more comfortably for many years.

When asked after her passing what inspired such labor, friends found only a single written sentence:

> "May easier steps help someone reach wisdom."

The Blessed One praised her unseen generosity.

XIV. Dedication in Times of Failure

Sāgaramati asked:

"What if one's efforts appear unsuccessful?"

Akṣobhya replied:

"Dedicate nevertheless.

Wholesome intention bears fruit according to causes and conditions unseen.

The farmer waters seeds before witnessing harvest."

XV. Dedication at Death

The Blessed One taught:

When approaching life's end, if clarity remains, recollect:

> Whatever merit has arisen throughout this life,
> knowingly or unknowingly,
> I release attachment to it.
>
> May it support the awakening,
> healing,
> courage,
> and liberation
> of all beings.

Then rest peacefully without regret.

XVI. The Great Circle

Another vision appeared.

The assembly saw beings offering kindness to strangers.

Those strangers later helped others.

The chain continued across continents and kalpas.

Eventually blessings returned to the original giver through entirely unexpected paths.

No beginning or ending could be identified.

The Buddha explained:

"Compassion circulates beyond calculation."

XVII. The Eight Universal Aspirations

The Blessed One encouraged practitioners frequently to reflect:

1. May wisdom increase.
2. May compassion deepen.
3. May fear diminish.
4. May truth prevail.
5. May generosity expand.
6. May reconciliation flourish.
7. May all beings encounter the Dharma.
8. May unsurpassed awakening arise everywhere.

XVIII. The Empty Ownership of Merit

Sāgaramati then asked:

"Who finally possesses merit?"

Akṣobhya answered:

"When examined through ultimate wisdom, no separate possessor can be found.

There are wholesome causes.

There are wholesome effects.

There is dependent origination.

But clinging to ownership obscures freedom.

Dedicate therefore without calculation."

XIX. The Great Aspiration

Then all assembled repeated together:

As space has no boundary,
may compassion know no boundary.

As sunlight shines without preference,
may generosity flow without preference.

As the mirror reflects without attachment,
may wisdom arise without pride.

As the blue lotus blooms unstained,
may all beings awaken amid the world.

The devas rejoiced greatly.

XX. Closing Gāthā

Finally the Blessed One summarized:

Keep nothing back

That may relieve suffering.

Hide no wisdom

That may encourage awakening.

Claim no merit

As private treasure.

Scatter it

Like rain upon thirsty ground.

For in giving away

The fruits of goodness,

The Bodhisattva discovers

That nothing essential

Has been lost,

And the whole universe

Has quietly become

One shared harvest

Of compassion.

When these words had been spoken, the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati and the immeasurable assembly dedicated every wholesome root generated by hearing the Dharma to the complete awakening of all sentient beings throughout the ten directions.

Blue lotuses opened across the crystal lakes of Abhirati.

The devas showered sapphire blossoms from the heavens.

The nāga kings, bodhisattvas, monks, nuns, householders, and celestial hosts rejoiced with one mind.

Colophon

The Transmission and Preservation of the Martiavyūha Sūtra

Thus concludes **The Martiavyūha Sūtra: The Array of the Red Nāgas and the Liberation of the Fear Harvesters**, a scripture arranged into nine books, seventy-two chapters, and seven appendices for the contemplation of practitioners who seek the realization of Mirror-Like Wisdom under the guidance of Akṣobhya Tathāgata.

This teaching proclaims that no being is forever imprisoned by fear, pride, or delusion. Through confession, ethical conduct, meditation, wisdom, compassion, and the generation of bodhicitta, even those long separated from the Dharma may rediscover the path of awakening.

The principal themes preserved throughout the scripture are these:

- The universality of Buddha-Nature.
- The transformation of fear through wisdom.
- The purification of power through service.
- The emptiness of domination and self-grasping.
- The cultivation of Mirror-Like Awareness.
- The Bodhisattva Vow for the liberation of all beings.
- Aspiration toward rebirth in the Pure Land of Abhirati.

- The inseparability of emptiness and compassion.
- The patient redemption of individuals and societies through wholesome causes and conditions.

The symbolic history of the Red World is presented so that readers may examine their own minds and communities. The hidden empires described herein should first be sought within greed, hatred, and delusion. The liberated kingdoms should first be established through generosity, ethical conduct, meditation, patience, and wisdom.

Therefore let no reader become attached merely to outward imagery while neglecting inward cultivation.

The Blessed Akṣobhya taught:

> Better than discovering a forgotten city
>
> Is recovering forgotten compassion.
>
> Better than conquering a distant realm
>
> Is mastering one's own anger.
>
> Better than uncovering hidden treasures
>
> Is revealing the jewel of bodhicitta already present within the heart.

Whoever preserves this scripture by copying it, reciting it, teaching it, translating it, contemplating it, or embodying even

a single passage through sincere action plants immeasurable wholesome roots.

Whoever explains it without seeking fame, wealth, or domination but solely for the reduction of suffering acts as a true heir of the Bodhisattvas.

Whoever encounters this teaching in times of despair should remember:

No delusion is permanent.

No fear is ultimate.

No hatred is beyond transformation.

No being is excluded from awakening.

No act of genuine compassion is ever lost.

As long as a single blue lotus blooms within the mud of saṃsāra, hope remains for every world.

Then all those assembled before Akṣobhya Tathāgata—the Bodhisattva Sāgaramati, the great bodhisattvas of the ten directions, the śrāvakas, the devas, the nāga kings, the yakṣas, gandharvas, kinnaras, monks, nuns, laymen, laywomen, and immeasurable multitudes of visible and invisible beings—rose together from their seats.

They circumambulated the Blessed One three times in a clockwise direction.

They scattered sapphire flowers upon the jeweled earth of Abhirati.

With one voice they proclaimed:

> May wisdom arise where fear has taken root.
>
> May compassion arise where hatred has flourished.
>
> May truth arise where deception has prevailed.
>
> May generosity arise where grasping has endured.
>
> May all beings discover the path beyond suffering.
>
> May all beings cultivate bodhicitta.
>
> May all beings behold the Pure Land of Abhirati.
>
> May all beings attain unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening.

The Blessed Akṣobhya remained seated in perfect equanimity.

The crystal lakes reflected the limitless sky.

The blue lotuses remained forever open.

The Dharma-wheel continued turning without beginning or end.

Thus is completed the **Martiavyūha Sūtra**, entrusted to future generations not as an object of possession but as a mirror for the awakening of wisdom and the cultivation of boundless compassion.

May its merit be dedicated equally to all sentient beings.

Svasti. Svasti. Svasti.